

Edassery Govindan Nair

The sculpture reproduced on the end paper depicts a scene where three soothsayers are interpreting to King Suddhodana the dream of Queen Maya, mother of Lord Buddha. Below them is seated a scribe recording the interpretation. This is perhaps the earliest available pictorial record of the use of writing in India.

From Nagarjunakonda. Second Century A.D.
Courtesy : National Museum, New Delhi.

MAKERS OF INDIAN LITERATURE

Edassery Govindan Nair

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I

BACKGROUND AND BIOGRAPHY

The dawn of twentieth century coincided with the advent of Romanticism in Malayalam Poetry which gained vigour, force and momentum in the next three decades. It was an entirely new vernal splendour, never known in the past, revealing a world of wonder. One of the main historical reasons behind the drastic change in form and content of the poetry of this period is the fact that writers and readers with their "English" education were acquainted with Romantic poetry of the western world. For them it was a new horizon; and the urge to spread wings of imagination to reach similar heights was an irresistible call from within and a challenge that could not but be responded. Another reason was the self-consuming decay of Neo-classical poetry which had degenerated into a process of mechanical versification. The new romantic trend was not mere transition to a period of experiments in novelty but an unprecedented upheaval of aesthetic creativity. The second decade was a period of intense creativity for Kumaran Asan, whose poetry unveiled a world of Romantic Agony and Love which carried with it a mystic spiritual halo. Patriotism was one of the dominating trends in the emotional content of poetry of the twenties and thirties during which time Poet Vallathol wrote his best narrative poems and patriotic lyrics. Lyricism and musical aspects endowed the younger generation's poetry with a new dynamism and fascination the trend setter being Changampuzha Krishna Pillai. In the thirties, Malayalam poetry also revealed the characteristic features of the 'Pink Decade'. Yearning for

an egalitarian system of Society was for some poets an intrinsic part of the concept of freedom and for some others an independent moral value. Vallathol and G. Sankara Kurup belonged to the former group, for whom, internationalism, patriotism and socialism could coexist without any conflict or contradiction. True to the domineering emotional trend of the Pink decade, the emotive thrust in the works of certain others was in favour of egalitarian values. The thrust included the concept of realism in the organic form of poetry, and also an aversion to the hypnotic elements of music and lyricism. To this set of poets, among whom Edassery Govindan Nair figured prominently, Realism had a powerful appeal. Others of the group were N.V. Krishna Warriar, Akkittam and Olappamanna. They were attracted to the simple life of the poor, of the down-trodden and the oppressed, in their quest for themes. Spiritual halo of romantic love became a thing of the past. They depicted the agony of the down to earth existence of the Common folk. Among those who presided over the transition from Romanticism to Realism Edassery Govindan Nair and Krishna Warriar are in the fore-front. The former was considerably senior by age but they belonged to the same age-group in literary activity. Formal education acquired by the former is practically insignificant whereas the latter, though purely a self-made person, was an authority on Sanskrit studies in the various branches of learning such as Philosophy, Literature, Linguistics & History. Professional status of the former was indeed quite modest, unlike that of the latter whose activities in various capacities like Professor, Chief Editor of Several publications, Director of Language Institute etc. conferred on him the intellectual leadership of the period. In spite of these differences, they are of the same status in poetic eminence.

Eddasery Govindan Nair was born on 23rd December 1906, in a lower middle-class family with an aristocratic lineage. The combination is not incompatible in Kerala, as people with aristocratic background are not of the same economic rung. The Surname Edassery is the name of

the family. It is a word derived from Eda-cheri ie the "middle-level" or "mid-place". Place names are often converted into housenames. Probably the family originally hailed from a locality which could be termed "in-between" certain others. Whatever be the derivative significance of the term, it has acquired a highly suggestive and apt connotation in regard to the poet's outlook of life and the poetic themes he chose. He was deeply concerned with the economic and social problems of the underdogs. He was by head, heart and soul a man of the "Edacheri", the lower middle-class, and the lowest of the low.

The Edassery family lived in Kuttippuram, near "Thirunava", a place of renown in the history of Kerala as it was there, that the famous "Mamanka", a festival of immense political importance held once in twelve years, was performed. It was there that the Suicide squads of the Ruler of Valluvanadu fought their way up through the columns of soldiers posted on either side, to the high stage where the Zamorin, Ruler of Kozhikode sat in state waiting to declare his supremacy after the last of the suicide squad fell fighting, fight and death were thus regular themes of the grandmother's tales told to children. This historical background of the poet's birthplace and its geographical association with one of the longest and widest rivers of Kerala, the "Perar", probably were two influences which moulded the young poet's personality. The archetype of "Sacrifice" frequently figured in his poems. The mother-figure who, like the river, nurtured sprouts of life with benign care and who devoured them in destructive moods, also appeared in some of his significant compositions. He lived in Ponnani, a village town near Kuttippuram.

The poet's father, P. Krishna Kurup who hailed from Talassery in North Malabar, was a peon in the Excise department under the Madras Government. Malabar was one of the Districts in the Madras Province during those days and was governed directly by the British unlike the other parts of Kerala whose rulers were the native Princes. The poet's mother, Kunjikkutty Amma; was a member of

the Eddassery family and by the matrilineal system, he belonged to that family - Any official of the Government, however low in rank, was in those days considered a very respectable citizen. To have a fixed income, especially from a Govt-job, was enough for a person to be held in high esteem in a society where ninety percent of the population did not possess any worthwhile employment fetching a regular income. A peon in the Service of the Govt. was indeed a man of high social status. But this respectability in society had no direct relation to the standard of living. Eddassery-house, despite its aristocratic halo, had been economically reduced to the lowest category. Kunjikkutty Amma's branch of the joint family was a large one. The lady had five children by her first marriage, two boys and three girls. Her mother and younger sisters also lived with them. In the matriarchal system this was not an unusual situation. The bond of marriage did not require the man to provide full financial support to his wife and children. The responsibility was vested on the 'Karanavar', the head of the family, usually maternal uncle or brother of the woman. In this case, no such protector was existing. The income from the limited landed property was indeed meagre. The whole family practically lived on the income of Krishna Kurup. Govindan was the new arrival into this large family. Though luxuries were alien to him in childhood he got love in abundance from all the elders. Maternal Kinship was the binding factor in the matrilineal system. Govindan was darling to all the elder sisters and brothers. In his remembrances of childhood, the poet has made affectionate references to an elder sister whose style of effective narration of folktales, legends and mythological stories had been a profound influence in enriching his imaginative experiences.

The untimely death of Krishna Kurup in 1921 was a severe blow to the family. Deprived of the only source of income all of a sudden, the family fell on evil days. Govindan, who was yet to complete high-school education, had to give up his studies and find out some means to shoulder the responsibility of looking after the family.

Discontinuing studies, he was on the look-out for a job. But it was not within reach for those who had neither any education of consequence nor training in specific fields. So his mother's brother-in-law, Sankaran Nair took him to Alleppey in the erstwhile Travancore State, to be trained as a clerical assistant to a legal practitioner. To be the clerk of a leading advocate was considered a covetable position for an intelligent youngster in those days. But in order to be qualified for the job one had to learn the trade in the capacity of an apprentice for quite a number of years. During the period of apprenticeship one is expected to render service without any remuneration, except that the basic expenses for food and shelter would be met by the employer. The position of an assistant to a reputed lawyer was prestigious and so Govindan's wagon of ambition was hitched to this star. Later, he did become one of the tribe of lawyer-clerks and remained so till the end of his life. This meant that he contributed his mite for the advocates to earn a name as well as wealth whereas his own earnings remained scanty. But their name and their wealth would be thrown into oblivion by posterity while he would be remembered by generations to come, not on account of his professional endeavours which usurped the major portion of his time, but in the name of the few blessed moments he snatched out of the tight schedule, to pen a few rimes.

At Alleppy he was working under Sankaran Nair who was an employee of a lawyer. He soon picked up the rudiments of the duties, role and functions of clerical assistants of advocates. During the first ten months of his work under Sankaran Nair he could earn nothing. A deep yearning to earn something and send it to his mother became a nagging obsession with him and so he engaged himself in giving tuition to a student during leisure hours. Two months' income was sufficient to purchase a blanket for the old mother. He sent the money through an acquaintance belonging to his neighbourhood in the native place, for the specific purpose. But, by the time he reached home after the visit to Alleppey, she had breathed her

last. Small-pox used to claim the lives of many in frequent succession during those days, when there was no preventive vaccination in the rural areas. Infact, son got the sad news days after the event. The fact that she had, succumbed after long illness just on the previous day of the arrival of the messenger who brought for her the first earnings of her son, a modest but invaluable gift, was an irreconcilable irony of fate. The shock and the impact were deep-imprinted on the sensitive mind of the boy. The feeling that he could not do anything to alleviate her helplessness and misery was a never-healing wound. Though autobiographical elements are sparse in the poems of Edassery, this incident and the remorseful sorrow have surfaced in one of his poems, "The Shepherd of Bimbisara" (1964). The Shepherd who was driving the herd of goats for the sacrifice to be performed by King Bimbisara, (eventually prevented by Lord Buddha) indulges in reminiscences when he sees the pathetic plight of a mother goat, who runs forward and backward to be with her two kids, a smart one in the front row and a lame one in the back row.

*"I too had a mother
When a King bought me, a slave,
She was given a price, a few coins
She tried them to my apron-strings
And left bare-handed
I bought a blanket, later
To protect her from cold
Alas! When I came with the gift at last
She had gone for eternal rest
Under the cover of a thick earthen blanket."*

For a boy Govindan's intellectual brilliance learning the tricks of the trade was easy and he made very good progress. He became assistant of M. Krishna Menon a reputed advocate of Alleppy. During this time he got acquainted with another youth of the same profession, Sri Manjoor Parameswaran Pillai who also had a taste for literature like himself. The first love being literature, particularly poetry, for both of them, they used to spend

their leisure together reading and discussing poetry. The attitude of the masters for whom they worked was not very encouraging. Perhaps they thought that these "useless" pursuits of their clerks would affect the singular devotion required of them in their profession. The apprehension was not entirely unfounded as is shown by an unusual situation they were caught in. It was the time when the famous narrative poem, "Kochuseetha" by the renowned poet Vallathol was being serialised in a periodical, the "Malayala Manorama". One day these two clerks were not found in their offices where clients had been impatiently waiting. They were at the Boat-Jetty at Alleppey eagerly looking for the arrival of the boat which would fetch the latest issue of the periodical. Poetry was hot cake for the hungry minds of the two. To neglect professional responsibilities in order to serve the muses was sheer madness according to the legal luminaries. Immune to literary taste and appeal, they imposed restraint on the extra professional interests of the clerks. During the long period of apprenticeship (it lasted for seven years) Govindan Nair was constrained to suppress his passion for poetry. The 'love-affair' continued in a clandestine way. The secret 'meetings' were rare and short.

In 1929 he bade farewell to Alleppey and went to Kozhikode which was nearer home and heart. Before the birth of the Kerala State people in the Central and northern regions could not cultivate deep emotional rapport with those in Southern areas. The distance was not merely geographical but temperamental too. Clerical work under an advocate in Kozhikode, Sri T. Kunjirama Menon provided more emotional satisfaction to Govindan. But the employment was not lucrative enough for a person who had many dependants and no other substantial sources of income.

Even in those days, young men of Kerala were inclined to seek fortune in other parts of the world. A job in Singapore or other Malaysian regions was among the rosiest dreams of the youth of the day as one in the Gulf-countries is, in the recent times. An acquaintance

who reached home for vacation from Singapore promised to take Govindan Nair there on his return. In order to make preliminary arrangements Govindan Nair left Kozhikode and came to his native place. But the proposed journey was not to be. His would-be-benefactor was called by Providence for his last journey. He met with Sudden death and Govindan Nair's dreams were shattered to pieces. Having already left the job for good, he had nothing to bank upon at Kozhikode. Therefore, instead of going back to the city, he tried to find out some means of livelihood in his native village itself. In those days, those who were familiar with the rudiments of legal practice, could assume pleadership at the Panchayat-Courts. On the strength of his practical knowledge in the field he ventured on this but could not make much headway. The lack-lustre profession fetched neither income nor social recognition. Soon he found out that it was an exercise in futility. Clerical work under an established legal practitioner appeared to be better and Govindan Nair was again at this job in Ponnani, the Taluk headquarters. There the court had a busy schedule and reputed advocates had substantial work and earnings. One of them, Sri K.V. Raman Menon, was prepared to utilise Govindan Nair's Services. The choice was made finally. One could not live on poetry, love and fresh air.

The work expected of an advocate's clerk would appear to be quite incompatible with poetic creativity. It was almost an impossible task as weaving a yarn out of sand. But Govindan Nair performed this in course of time. He applied himself with supreme dedication to the work; took meticulous care to fulfil his responsibilities with utmost sincerity. He found in the bundles of 'Case-files' not mere legal intricacies but real problems of life of the common folk. They revealed to the poet the depth and magnitude of the struggles of life, the sufferings of the village people, the pains inflicted on man by man, and the basic truths of human mind driven by self-preservative instinct. They ignited his insight into the evils of the economic structure and the necessity for reconstructing

it in such a way, that class-differences are levelled up once for all through operations, compatible with humane qualities. They had unveiled before him, reliable pictures of the existential realities of the simple human being; they provided him with a holy sense of humour - a capacity to laugh at human follies and laugh away human frailties and a capability to put on a smile that verges on tears. They helped him to identify himself with the suffering section of the people and sing of the short simple annals of the poor and the downtrodden. For him, the apparent incompatibility between the profession and the creative hobby melted away and eventually the profession provided a perennial source of inspiration for creative activity.

Acquisition of knowledge in language and literature being limited, as opportunity for higher education had been denied, the poet strove hard with a determination to enrich his vocabulary and proficiency in language through self-study. He started learning Sanskrit and English. Kuttikrishna Marar and Nalappathu Narayana Menon were examples to be emulated in this respect and both rendered occasional help too. Marar had acquired Scholarship in the Sanskrit Kavyas and Sastras by conventional education. Narayana Menon learned both English and Sanskrit through self-study. It was he who enriched Malayalam Literature by translating 'Les Miserable' of Victor Hugo from its English Version. He had translated in verse-form "Light of Asia" the renowned work on the life of the Buddha by Edwin Arnold. He helped both Marar and Govindan Nair in their venture of learning the fundamentals of English language. These two friendly mentors of Govindan Nair had retained a certain amount of conservatism in their outlook of life, particularly in their view of social system. But Govindan Nair was keenly aware of the economic realities of the class to which he belonged. He imbibed socialistic ideas and revolutionary concepts in the most natural way; by close observation of life around and analysis of experiences; not from a study of theories described in books of ideology. To his young mind the process was as photosynthesis to green leaves. The

minds of his mentors were cast in a different mould and therefore a parting of ways took place in matters of approach to problems of life and their literary expressions. Govindan Nair had also imbibed the cultural heritage of India in an overwhelming measure just as his preceptors; but he did not hesitate to keep an open mind towards the new ideologies and the analysis of the history of human race in the new light shed by dialectical materialism. Socialist system of Society caught his imagination. He had immense sympathy for the suffering downtrodden. Regarding the means to achieve socialist system he had doubts, predilections and indecisions. The tradition of non-violence which was prevalent in India in the age of the upanishads and was subsequently revived and reinforced by philosophers and prophets like the Buddha, has been imprinted in the mental make up of humane Indian intellectuals in general. Edassery had inherited this ancestral trait and he knew that he could not shake off this heritage from his psyche. But at the same time he was not blind to the fact that the glorious tradition had not been a means of redemption for the lowliest and the lost. This paradox drove some of the finest minds to the camp of those who visualised violence as an ultimate resort. It had to be resorted to as the last weapon and necessary evil when non-violent methods proved a failure. One small poem, 'The Buddha, the leopard and myself' (1951) reveals how obsessive this emotional conflict was for him. The speaker in the poem is on his way home. He has a rice-packet with him. Starved children are waiting at home. He has to cross a thick bush in which there is the leopard. If he takes a round about route avoiding the bush it may be too late. He may not be able to save the starving kids. He decides to take the risk. He finds a statue of the Buddha on his way through the bush. The moment he reaches the spot the leopard pounces at him. He overturns the statue on the beast and manages to escape. The story breathes the incredibility of a fable and the poet is quite aware of it. Hence he has related the story in a humorous vein. But there is a point that he wants to hit on the head. Who

is to be protected? The beast or the hungry kids? No doubt, the latter. If so, why bother about the means? The leopard would not heed to nonviolent philosophy and preachings of the Buddha. Therefore, it will not be sacrilegious to use the statue of the Prophet of non-violence, as a weapon of self-defence. The fact that the poet used to indulge in such musings does not mean that he wholeheartedly welcomed the concept of revolution with blood-shed. It only shows that he had a firm belief that in the universal scheme of nature violence was not something alien and there were occasions when aversion to it would be symptom of cowardice. His poem "Mullam cheera" contains a plain expression of this faith. By and large the poet had faith in Gandhism. During the freedom-struggle he was a faithful follower of Mahatma Gandhi and was with the nationalists ideologically. During the famous 'Satyagraha' at Guruvayoor for establishing the right of the Harijans to enter into temple and worship he worked as an associate of the local leader Kolappaji who was a true 'congress man' and an idealist (After independence, Kolappaji along with certain other idealists drifted away from those who shared power and authority, and got immersed in the Sarvodaya movement). In 1942 the poet was with the intellectuals who supported the 'Quit-India struggle'. The socialist philosophy of the Communist Party deeply influenced his outlook, but not at the cost of nationalism and patriotism. The needle of the party's compass always pointed to the Soviet Union for direction. When Russia joined the Allies they turned out to be supporters of the British and were opposed to the Quit-India-movement. Govindan Nair's patriotic sentiments did not approve of such anti-nationalistic feelings and policies, while the idea of an egalitarian society to be established through a revolutionary change was one of his fondest dreams. In Ponnani, there was a local leader, Krishna Panickar, who had participated in the freedom struggle. He was a victim to the cruelty of Police force and languished in the British jails. A reading room and library was established in Ponnani in 1935 as a memorial to this martyr. Govindan Nair was a faithful

follower of this local leader; and had worked hard to mobilise resources and popular enthusiasm for constructing the memorial building and for the progress of the reading room. The literary minded youth and the local literary luminaries chose this place as the venue for their meetings and discussions and it very soon developed into a centre for cultural activities. Political, Social and Literary discussions frequently held at this centre were stimulating to the youth. This library cum reading room virtually turned out to be a literary work-shop which helped to mould the personality of writers like V.T. Bhattatirippad, P.C. Kultikrishnan Edassery Govindan Nair and Akkittam Achyuthan Namboodri. Govindan Nair had undertaken the dangerous responsibility of secret distribution of the 'Swatanthra Bharatam' an underground paper banned by the Government. His faith in Gandhian philosophy and methods was deep-rooted as is proclaimed in the poem "Rishiyute dhenu" (The cow of the Sage 1945) in which the 'Charkha' (Spinning Wheel) is metaphorically identified with the divine cow, Heaven's prestige, who showers all blessings on the devoted. The cow, as envisaged in the poem, gives forth sustaining milk incessantly. But this nonviolent protective care is not its only function. For the sake of self-protection, murderous arrows could be shot out of its body. In the poem the cow "roars" against the evil of exploitation and oppression. The non-stopping process of spinning yarn, the incessant flow of the milk, is conceived as means to create an egalitarian Society, levelling up the existing system of inequality. Many intellectuals of the period saw no irreconcilable contradiction between the social justice envisaged by Marxian Philosophy and the egalitarian concept of Gandhian thought. They did not like to think that 'the twain never shall meet'. They indulged in wishful thinking of harmonising the two philosophies at some point. Govindan Nair in a reflective moment of self-analysis observed thus:

"I believe in God. But whenever I wanted to depict the problem of hunger and the callousness of the wealthy towards the poor I could not take the stand that God

is in the heaven and all is right with the world. On such occasions I discard the believer's tolerance and philosophical resignation. As a result, the poet who swears by Gandhiji, writes poems questioning the wisdom of the believer's tolerance and the passivism of Gandhian philosophy. Thus a person who is a devotee of Gandhiji and who has not learned the fundamental principles of Marxism from class rooms conducted by 'Study Circles', happens to write such poems on the realities of life that could be effective contributions to the propagandist literature of the communists. The congress party often took me to be a communist and the communist party kept a respectable distance from this Gandhian. But, forget not, this gave me a sense of freedom to be faithful to myself and to be true to my feelings when I write".

The only significant play he wrote has collective farming as its theme and its title "Koottukrishi" means the same. One of the poet's famous poems, "The fresh clay pot and the seythe" proclaims the principle that land should belong to the tiller. Both the works are equally revolutionary in spirit. But the emphasis is on collective farming of land and mass-control of production in the former whereas the emotional bond and the possessive instinct of the tiller towards the land are highlighted in the latter. How can one uphold both simultaneously namely collectivisation and the tillers' ownership of land? In fact the poet has his own conviction that the contradiction is not a real one but illusory. In the play the tillers belonging to different social sections and communities, realise that unhealthy competitions, rivalries and selfish motives do not promote the ultimate goal of increased productivity. Instead of partitioning land into tiny pieces and indulging in mutual enmities, if labour is put in on a cooperative basis and capital is used collectively several hazards of farming in small pieces of land can be eliminated and consequently productivity will enormously increase. This co operative farming does not dispossess or alienate the farmer. The instinctive attachment of the tiller to the land is not negated. The

poet is against the unhealthy cutthroat competition of the capitalist system but not against individual enterprise which can be extended and enhanced through cooperative organisation. The collectivisation that he visualises is not synonymous with totalitarianism or state capitalism. We will again discuss this in the context of the analysis of the poem.

Both the play and the poem won awards from the Govt. of Madras. Malabar was part of the Madras Province before the turn of the second half of the century. Later in life Edassery was recipient of an annual grant of Rs. 600 from the central govt. Even this apology for an aid provided a little economic relief to him as he used to be in such dire need as to welcome any amount. He was incessantly under financial strain, income from his modest profession being awfully inadequate. In spite of his struggle to make both ends meet he was always ready to extend a helping hand to the needy, oblivious of his own unenviable position.

The poet got married to Smt. Janaki Amma of Edakkunni House in January 1938. She had poetic talents and used to write poems and stories. But in course of time when the family grew and she got fully immersed in the responsibilities of household cores and worries looking after children, she found no time to indulge in the luxury of creative activities. But she maintained an active interest in her husband's writings. She was always the first reader of his poems who even gave suggestions and critical remarks for improvement. She was a source of inspiration and strength for him and a faithful assistant to take care of the quality standards of the poetic products.

The common people in the town and suburbs of Ponnani were never aware that a literary giant walked among them. For them, Edassery was a remarkably good man who would sincerely share their pleasures and pains, a friend in need. The doors of his generosity were shut before none. Once, a friend under extreme financial strain,

had made some temporary adjustments with public money under his custody but could not replace it in the appropriate time. To save him from the humiliation of imprisonment and dismissal from job which was his sole means of living, the poet not only went to the extent of mortgaging his own residential compound and remitting the amount but also took the responsibility of the crime on his own shoulders! This was done by a man who had a large family and who struggled hard to meet basic requirements. His wife gave birth to eleven children, three of whom could not survive long. A person with a meagre income and no inherited wealth, would normally be desperate, especially during the post war years of economic depression, if he happened to have several dependments. This was the situation Govindan Nair had to face during the beginning of his career. He had faced it courageously and somehow managed to keep the wolf off the door. This previous experience must have stood him in good stead when, later, he had to give food, shelter and education to eight children, six boys and two girls. Because of financial stringencies he could not provide proper higher education to the two elder sons. They had to leave home in search of employment. They were studious and possessed high intellectual abilities. But they preferred to work and contribute to the family income and not over-burden their struggling father. This was cause for life-long remorse for the poet. It tormented him till the end, according to one of his sons. But on the whole his was a happy and contented family. All the children now occupy financially secure positions. Among them, there are Engineer, doctor, and other professionals. The poet was a liberal-minded indulgent parent never imposing his will or decisions on the children, always being ready for open discussion on any topic they are interested in. He was more than a father, 'a friend philosopher and guide to them.

Govindan Nair had taken part in political activities in his younger days. While he was closely associated with the management of the krishna panickar Memorial library

and reading room he had also been interested in continuing the political work and legacy of the person in whose honour the institution was established. He participated in the activities of the local branch of Indian National congress. His work was not merely confined to the clandestine distribution of the banned newspaper, 'Swatantra bharatam'. He had also written pamphlets propagating the views and aims of the Congress. In 1942 when an action committee was constituted in Ponnani in connection with the Quit India Movement, he was elected as a member along with other eminent persons like K.B. Menon, Raghava Kurup, and N. Krishnan Nair. At one of the meetings held at the residence of Govindan Nair at midnight, a well wisher suggested that Govindan Nair who had a family to take care of should be careful not to appear in the fore-front. This was the spontaneous reply from the poet; "Satish and Hari will somehow grow up. This struggle is our duty to Motherland". These two elder boys "grew up somehow"; but they, as has been already observed, were not fortunate enough to get higher education inspite of their high intellectual calibre and thus were losers partly due to the political consciousness and the conscientiousness of their father. Had he been more intent on earning money by concentrating on his profession without diffusing energy on other efforts, they would have certainly got better opportunities for higher education.

After the achievement of Independence, the poet gradually got disillusioned with the slow pace of progress, the socialist ideal receding farther and farther away, and the rift between preaching and practice manifested deep in the activities of all political parties. A poem, "When ideologies slumber" (1956) reveals the depth of disillusionment. Outwardly, it is the story of a village girl who elopes with a young man who, status-wise, does not deserve her. She is disgusted with her indifferent father with his conservative old-world ideas, and her brother incapable of doing anything except making grandiloquent speeches on ideological principles. Inwardly the poem is

a strong criticism of the ineffectiveness of the political masters and the self-appointed guardian's of the people, in delivering goods. Once in every five years or even more frequently the change of guards takes place but the lot of the common folk does not improve. The natural consequence of this disillusionment was, as in the case of several other eminent intellectuals of the period, to keep a respectful distance from active politics, leaving it to the hands of opportunists careerists and fortune hunters. The thrill of living in a free India, where oppression and exploitation would be obsolete remained a distant dream; the poet's distress and disillusionment grew with years.

Edassery passed away on 16th October 1974. It was a peaceful departure like the fall of a leaf. As usual, he was having breakfast with the members of his family. Suddenly he felt sick and giddy. Within moments he lost consciousness. It took some time for the family to realise that the swooning was not momentary but the symptom of a massive heart attack. He was descending into Eternal Sleep.

II

POETIC WORKS THE BEGINNING

The Majority of the poetic compositions of Edassery are lyrical in nature. There are quite a good number of narratives, but the style of narration is not devoid of lyricism. In the second decade of this century, narrative poems were the more prevalent form adopted by eminent poets. Though the trend continued to have its sway in the twenties in the compositions of the next generation of poets the transition to lyrical poetry had commenced, as has already been pointed out. Short poems with lyrical structure and non-story content, dealing with subjective sentiments of various kinds, began to appear even by the end of the first decade. Influence of English Romantic poetry meant an instantaneous attraction to poetic forms like ode, dramatic monologues and Sonnets. Lyricism generally goes with mellifluonsness and melody, and this accentuated the employment of Dravidian meters which have more scope for musical reciting.

Some of Edassery's earlier compositions belong to the former category of narratives in the Sanskrit meters. Many of those teen-age writings are lost. The earliest of his published poems is Ahalya (1928-1929). The familiar story of the Puranic character is narrated in it in forty four quatrains. A friend took away the manuscript for perusal but secretly got it published in a periodical in his own name. The experience of seeing one's first poem published in another's name is indeed painful but the poet forgave his friend and tried to forget the pain caused by the breach of faith. In artistic excellence, it could not claim remarkable heights but it was something to be proud of

for a youngster. There is touch of originality in certain concepts. For example Ahalya says that she is grateful to her saviour who transferred the stony character of her body to her mind. For her it was a resurrection in two ways - she regained the softness, flexibility and mobility of her body; at the same time the story strength and hardness were retained by her mind, meaning that she would never again succumb to impetuosity.

Some of the poems of this early period are allegorical. "A creeper" (1928-29) is outwardly a description of a beautiful flowering creeper; but the plant has an anima within, an adored damsel. Obviously there was an inner compulsion to disguise the subjective emotional element. Another poem "Santvanam (1928-29) (consoling) depicts the "Dawn" as an innocent girl who gave her everything to the lover, Sun, but was deserted by him when he was drawn to another Beauty the Dusk. The consoling remarks of the sympathetic observer are that the Sun would return to Dawn. The phenomenon in Nature is obviously a cover for the theme of man's unfaithfulness. In a poem, 'cloud' (1932) the cloud stands for a remorse-stricken individual who indulged in exploitation and cruelty in his hey-days but was subsequently deprived of all possessions and reduced to a non-entity. In the fallen state the realisation dawns on him that he should have acted as a trustee of wealth which belongs to all, and that the spirit of sacrifice alone would generate abiding happiness. In a poem "The Storm" (1933) once again the cloud is metaphorically identified with a callous capitalist who looks down on the improverished destitute with utter contempt. The 'storm' is the devastating Nemesis that awaits the cloud. The mountain initially tries to protect the cloud from the fury of the storm; but the storm warns the cloud of the impending ultimate disaster, as the destructive force in its possession comes from the heavens of thousands of the lowliest and the oppressed. The metaphor might appear far-fetched and strained. It is mentioned here to throw light on poet's line of thinking in this early period. In the 'pink thirties' intellectuals all

over the world had welcomed the socialist revolution and its triumph in the Soviet Union. Though freedom struggle was the immediate concern, for many in India, the dream of the 'Scarlet dawn' had come to stay in the poetic Psyche.

A poem "Chantu and Othenan" (1935) pays homage to the warriors who are celebrated in the folk-tales of Malabar. Those incarnations of valour and courage fought and died for the sake of others. They were, like the Knights of England warriors who fought fierce duels to safeguard the interests of those who sought their help. In an age when cowardice passes for peace and weakness for patience, the forgotten spirit of valour has to be re-awakened. The poet says that the life blood of the poor people is used as red paint to adorn the face of the goddess of wealth wedded to the high-ups. This according to him, is the outcome of cowardice and misplaced patience. This has to be overcome. The chanting of the ballads prevalent in the northern regions of Kerala among the tillers and the toiling folks, would serve as means of autosuggestion to cure cowardice and misplaced tolerance. The poet's conviction that poetry has to fulfil its Social Commitments is clearly proclaimed in such compositions. It has to be noted that this poem, the proclamation apart, does not have Significant claims to poetic excellence and the poet is not quite unaware of that. He was not prepared to compromise quality in the name of propaganda as some of his compeers were inclined to do. The compositions of this early stage are to be reckoned as products of the work-shop exercise. He was convinced that artistic excellence is a prerequisite for effective propaganda as is illustrated by his own creations of a subsequent period.

Women of medieval Kerala were equally valorous. They never used tears as weapon to dissuade their men from self-sacrificing endeavours and risky adventures. The concept of values differs from age to age. The sacrifice of the suicide squads who fought and died in order to satisfy the false sense of prestige of the Feudal lords would now appear as a sheer exercise in futility. Historians

viewing things in retrospect are not likely to arrive at a different conclusion. But the sentiments of people centuries ago were entirely different. The poem "Father of the darling" (1934) is a monologue revealing the thoughts of a mother of that period. A warrior of the Suicide-squad (chaver) bids farewell to his wife and goes to fight and die for the Feudal Lord. She gives birth to his son after he met valiant death. When the mother narrates the story to the young boy, his spontaneous reaction is this: "Let me go, forth with, to fight like my father". The poet brings out the piognancy of the tragedy on the one hand and the glory of the valour, irrespective of the motive behind it.

These hymns of valour have a bearing on 'Zeitgeist', the spirit of the age. The emphasis is on the fact that the quality of valour is in our blood, a value inherited from our ancestors though now dormant. This valour has to be re-awakened in the people who are to plunge into the war for independence, the noblest of causes. Patriotic poems written by Vallathol Narayana Menon had inspired the masses and the writers of the younger generation. Edassery also wrote a few pieces of this category. There are hymns among them in the model of 'Vande Mataram' by Benkini Chandra Chatterji, and "Vandippin Matavine" by Vallathol.

One narrative poem, 'Orre nivedanam' (An exhortation 1932), has its theme from a dramatic situation in Mahabharata, where Droupadi living in disguise in the palace of King Virata meets Bhima who works in disguise as a cook, and exhorts him to come to her rescue from the rogue Kichaka who is after her. The hero's words regarding the pangs of slavery and his determination to destroy the enemy contain a special significance as we read into it the restlessness and the thirst for revenge surging in the minds of the young men of the writer's age. As to form the poem is old-fashioned. Written in the Sanskrit metre. The fifty-old quatrains have a form and style of the earlier days, but they breathe out passions

befitting the Romantic tempo. It reminds one of Bhima, the hero, who conceals a vulcano within the frame of an unsophisticated cook.

In the poem of Edassery autobiographical elements and personal reflections are generally rare. But a few instances can be found here and there. A poem 'Janaki' is an elegy on the death of a beloved niece (1928-29). Love poems are few and far between, in the whole of his poetic career. Yet there are a few beautiful ones belonging to the early stage. One written on the love of Radha is of exquisite charm. (Vrindavanattile Radha) "Vrajattile Viruthan", describes the complaints the women of Vraja brought to Yasoda against the mischiefs and childish pranks of the Divine child Krishna.

There is a long narrative poem "madya maranam" (1934) belonging to this formative period. It is intended as a criticism on the habit of drinking. The strange story goes as follows: Cheeran and Satyabalan were intimate friends; but due to irony of fate they had to part ways. The girl whom Satyabalan loved ardently was forced to marry cheeran. Satyabalan soon left the village when he realised that idle tongues would destroy the girl's life. But even this did not save her. She was dutiful and faithful but Cheeran thought that her mind was elsewhere. He got desperate and took to drinking. He neglected his wife and children, squandered his immense wealth on drinking while the children starved. After twenty years Satyabalan happened to return. On the roadside a drunken man lay unconscious. He recognised Cheeran and carried him to his house. The woman of the house had been reduced to a ghost of her former self. On seeing the person whom she worshipped within the shrine of her heart, the Shock of delight was too much for her frail body. She fell dead into his stretched arms. Stupefied and Stunned at the turn of events he sat there with the body in his lap. After a few hours Cheeran opened his eyes. In his half-conscious state of mind, what he saw infuriated him. He snatched a scythe and killed the old friend not releasing his wife was lying dead. The legal proceedings went on

as usual. Capital punishment was meted out for the murderer. It was not the concern of the guardians of legal justice, to do social justice to the orphaned children. The criticism, thus is turned against the blindness of legal justice and also against the concept of Capital punishment. The story is a feeble mishmash, too improbable, and strange to hold the two-pronged criticism firmly, illustrating how committed poetry can fail in propaganda, if it fails to conform to aesthetic truth.

'Pratijna (Vow-1935) is another poem of the same period with the same commitment. Fight against the evils of drinking was one of the programmes envisaged by Gandhiji to redeem the common man, the social uplift of whom had been considered the fulcrum of the activities connected with freedom struggle. Apart from this motive of propaganda there is nothing commendable in this poem also. The poet had intended to publish a collection of poems under the high sounding title 'Udupanjaram' (A Cage of Stars) but it did not come off. The poems of this initial stage exhibit not much of a spark of genius. The blooming came with inner maturity. Changampuzha Krishna Pillai, five years younger to Govindan Nair, had risen to the peak of his poetic career by the second half of the fourth decade much before he completed thirty years of age. His was a different type of creative genius, a thunder storm pouring out the treasured riches in torrents. He lived a fast life, wrote poetry incessantly for two decades and the bulk of his contribution was twice as much in volume as that of Eddassery whose creative endeavours were evenly spread over a span of four decades. Edassery's poetic stature developed slowly but steadily. Exuberance of emotions, profundity of lyrical voice and the depth of romantic agony are the factors that enthrall the reader in the poems of changampuzha. Visionary insight, philosophical depth, Stark realism and above all an overwhelming humanism are the enduring features of the poems of Edassery. A comprehensive idea of these qualities can be given through descriptions of the contents of some of the significant poems in each of

the successive collections. But the aesthetic experience of response to poetry is much more than that. The colourful verbal structure and the innumerable shades of meaning which make a poem an aesthetic expression cannot be conveyed through a paraphrase or an interpretation. The limitation is more acute when it has to be done in a language different from that of the poem. The rhythm, the cadence, the resonance, the inherent emotive structure etc. are beyond recreative attempts in interpretative analysis or description. The readers are to keep this in mind as they are invited for a Sojourn through the main poems in successive collections.

"Alakavali" (cluster of curls) is the first collection published in 1940 with twenty one poems mostly of lyrical nature. Two poems are translations from English, one from Tennyson and the other from Long fellow. Four pieces are in the Sanskrit metres. Their style and structure indicate the neoclassic taste still lingering on. Themes have a richness in variety - love, patriotism, theism, pensiveness, nature's benign influence, thoughts on the futility of wars etc. One love poem had been given the title "my selfishness" when it was first published in a periodical in 1936. But it was included in the collection with the title "my sincerity". It elaborates the lover's passionate possessive yearnings :

*"None but my eyes should make you blush
and paint your cheeks in red
None but I should breathe in your heart's
fragrant breeze
None but my ears should drink in the honey
of your fine flowery words
None but I be ever the target of the glances
from those dark eyes.*

During this period a few other love poems, not included in any collection, had been published. Ethineppatti (On which - 1936) and Ragageeti (Love Song 1937) are superb poems. In the first the beloved is not mentioned at all. Outwardly it is a poem on a river. The benign

beauties of the river are enchanting. The minstrel wonders which of the infinite varieties of 'Her' charms comes foremost. All are equally glorious and adorable. The epithets given to the infinite varieties of charms that "age cannot wither nor custom stale", unveil the real source of inspiration, the Beloved. The second is in the line of Mystic poems which identify the Beloved with the Divine. Hound of Heaven is also the hound of earth. Love and piety are one and the same. The Lamp lighted in the lover's heart spreads like fire into the fibres of his existence and becomes an all consuming presence. Union with the Beloved gives the strange awareness of a remoteness as it is in union with the Unseen Power. Both are nearest of the near but farthest of the far. 'Premopaharangal' (1939) (Tokens of Love) is a poem of undisguised love. The beloved presents the lover with a precious token of love, an embroidered handkerchief. The design stitched on it is a creeper on a young mango tree. The love-lorn village damsel is not sophisticated enough to come out in the open and express her feelings. Her modesty does not permit her to be so explicit as to stitch in his name as part of the embroidery; but the relationship of the creeper and the tree is eloquent, and it unveils an imaginative mind and a refined literary sensibility.

A narrative poem 'Pallichondal' (The fishing-rod of Heaven 1939) in the collection 'Alakavali', deserves analytical study as it throws light on the poet's rational approach to certain truths of human existence which are beyond the grasp of logic. Faith in God is one such truth. The poet is not among those who denounce materialist philosophy and scientific approach to life. But he has at the same time a liberal approach to the psychological facts of human existence. Faith in God, according to him, is not an issue to be established or denounced by philosophic discourses. For those who possess it, its essential value is beyond any argument. A believer must be free to maintain his belief as an atheist is free to hold his disbelief - 'Pallichondal' is a poem that reveals the psychology of faith that overpowers the human mind. It reminds one

of "The Hound of Heaven" (Francis Thompson). Soman was an ardent devotee of God taking meticulous care to perform the daily elaborate rituals of worship without any flaw. He was blessed with a son after a very long period of prayer and waiting, and was convinced that it was God's unbounded mercy. He had tided over several situations of crisis through unexpected means which appeared to him God-sent. His devotional passions grew in strength and intensity day by day. On one occasion legal action was instituted against him on account of his failure to pay tax. Even the Kitchen-Utensils were confiscated by the officials. But a well wisher appeared on the scene all of a sudden, just in time to remit the full amount, rescuing him from disgrace and the distress. On another occasion some honourable guests came unexpectedly. The store-room was empty. No money either. The guests had to be treated with proper hospitality. He was panic-stricken, not knowing how to meet the situation. But his wife rose to the occasion. She took off her ear-rings and gave them to him to be pawned in order to raise enough funds. Thus they could save their faces. Similar incidents were interpreted as providential mercy. And then came "the most unkindest cut of all". The baby was stricken by a fatal disease. They prayed and prayed to God. Several days of agonising anxiety rolled on. Their faith in God sustained them. When ultimately cruel fate snatched off their darling, it was unbearable and incredible. Soman suddenly lost all his faith in God. It was as though he was caught in a devastating storm. And in this desperate situation, the King's spiritual preceptor and a disciple visited him to convey homage and admiration for his undaunted faith. Soman took it as an outrageous remark. Infuriated he threw away the idol of God in their presence and showed them the door. The disciple was shocked at this behaviour but the Guru told him that they would wait and see. They lingered on in the premises and the next day they saw a contrite

remorse-stricken Soman retrieving the idol from the rubbish and planting it on the pedestal after performing penitential sacraments. It shows that you have no escape from the "Hound of Heaven". The poet declares: "Piety is to the Hook of Heaven. Once it is swallowed the fish in caught never to slip off".

The poem throws light into the psychology of faith, which cannot be explained by reasoning. To denounce it as ignorance is unwise. If life's little joys make one devoted to God, suffering only intensifies it. Inflictors of pain are not generally worshipped, but that is exactly what happens in the relationship with the unseen Power. Sorrow and pain enhance the intensity of devotional fervour. Faith or theism is instinctive for many. It cannot be wiped out of the psyche if you simply erase it from the conscious mind. It is not something that one learns to possess or acquires by reasoning. By the very same logic learning or reasoning does not enable one to discard it or disclaim it.

It was powers of reasoning, instinctive compassion for all who suffer, rational outlook of life and above all a predilection for scientific analysis of historical facts that attracted Edassery emotionally as well as intellectually to the ideology meant to establish an egalitarian society through revolution. But no sense of inconsistency tormented him when he realised that faith in God was not mere opium to the mind. Several admirers of his poetry, nevertheless found this to be enigmatic and inexplicable. Proponents of certain political ideologies have found this to be particularly inconvenient or irksome as a prick, if not a hook, in their throats.

'Kalavanti' (Bullock Cart) is another poem in this collection, a significant piece among his early creations. It tells the sad story of a village youth - the tragic end of an unfulfilled love a rustic man for a simple village-girl. Life of the poor folk is depicted here realistically. Tempestuous passions are alien to the simple folk and

therefore neither dramatic conflicts nor unexpected turns of events occur. Yet the poem throbs with poignant pathos and one can overhear the "Still sad music of humanity", provided he possesses a keen receptive ear.

Little ironies of life have always had their own appeal to the poet. In "Nizhalppattil" (under the shadow - 1940) a thief is examining the contents of a box in the dark of the night. He had stolen it from a decent looking Khadiciad gentleman. There is nothing worthwhile in it. A torn shirt, a Gandhicap and such other trivial things. But a well-preserved cover emerges from the bottom. Opening it the thief finds a very old love-letter". It seems there is a woman somewhere waiting for even this good-for-nothing fellow....!" That was the indifferent comment of the thief. A cop arrives on the scene and questions him. Coolly he says that he is a traveller long separated from his beloved and is reading the letter for the umpteenth time. The policeman is not quite convinced in spite of the spontaneity of the story and the expression of innocence. But even he does not consider it worthwhile to hold him in the name of a futile theft. The thief later on throws away the box and the contents. What had been a treasure for the original owner was just a worthless piece of paper for others! This incident will appear too insignificant to be the topic for a poem. But Edassery's sense of humour has something exceptional about it. He penetrates into the dark recess beneath the apparently insignificant situations and unearths ironies which provoke philosophic speculations. The poem has been given a strange caption, "Under Shadow"; outwardly it refers to the shadow of the tree and the cover of darkness chosen by the thief as he examines the contents of the box. But it also refers to shadow concealing certain basic truths of human existence. All values are relative. What is meat for one is venom for another. Truth and falsehood are but two sides of the same coin. Values are determined by circumstances, individuals and time. Those who seek absolute values for all times and for all places are groping in the dark. They are under shadow for ever!

Edassery published two small plays between 1947 and 1950. Noolamala (The knotted problem) is woven around the problems involving the love affairs of two women. Intrigues due to jealousy are the 'knot'. The other play 'Koothikrishi' (collective farming) won fame, as already pointed out on account of both the novelty of its theme and its high technical qualities as a stage play. It consciously aimed at propagating certain positive social values and criticising certain negative attitudes. The propaganda was effective and successful and earned an eminent place for Edassery among the writers of Progressive Literature, a literary movement which started in Kerala in 1936, known in the beginning by the name "Living Literature". The intellectuals were then generally in an enthusiastic mood to welcome revolutionary changes in the economic structure and social system. Many of them had entertained the dreams that private property would soon be a thing of the past and schemes like collective farming would soon be a reality. But as mentioned earlier, Edassery has not underrated the emotional factors in the tiller's relationship with the Soil. The play depicted collective farming as a cooperative endeavour of the farmers who would cast off their factional identities like caste and religion and be members of the vast multitude of humanity. A poetic dream, indeed, as that of Ravindranath Tagore who envisaged a world that "has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls". After four decades, to our utter consternation and confusion, we now find the cleavage much wider and deeper.

Among his dramatic compositions, there are three one-act plays: Kaliyum Chiriyum (Play and Laughter - 1954) Ennicchutta Appam (Hand to mouth existence - 1957) and Chaliyathi (The chaliya woman - 1960) and Netiyil Pataratta Mulla (The Jasmine creeper without support). All are realistic depiction of the life and problems seen around.

III

IN THE FRONT-LINE

The second collection 'Puthan Kalavum Arivalum' (The fresh clay pot and the Scythe' - 1951) brought Edassery to the front-line of poets in Malayalam. Among the seventeen lyrical compositions in the collection 'Panimutakkam' (The Strike Jan-1948) 'Puthankalauum Arivalum' (Oct-1948) and Kalyana Pputava (1951) have been widely discussed and evaluated as they are significant for seekers of social commitment as well as literary merit. Each poem deserves elaborate analysis as answers are to be found therein for questions regarding the poet's ideological stand, philosophical outlook and the path of action he would advocate. The poems are enchanting not merely because of their contents but also because of their lyrical charms, musical qualities, apparent restraint along with internal depth of emotions achieved by the suggestiveness of words, the meticulous care taken to weigh the appropriateness of epithets, totality of the effect of verbal patterns etc. These qualities are to be experienced and not to be communicated through interpretation. When a descriptive analysis of the contents is attempted here, these qualities are not at all intended to be marginalised. In 'Panimutakkam' and 'Puthankalavum Arivatum' the theme is the sad plight of the exploited labourers. Attainment of political freedom did not bring economic freedom. The labourers in factories were at the mercy of the capitalist and tillers of soil at the mercy of the land-lord. The incident described in "The strike" is as follows: Raman, a worker in a textile factory is father of ten children. The factory owner is a typical exploiter

who turns a deaf ear to the demands of the workers. They decide to strike work. Even after one month of strike the owner does not budge an inch. A few of the workers, then decide to get in for work finding no other way to keep the wolf out of doors. Other who do not lose courage refuse to bend their knees. Those who come forward to prevent the 'black legs' entering for work are cruelly beaten up by the police. Raman is among them and gets seriously wounded. His starving children wait for him in the hut and anxiously repeat the innocent question everyday "won't they open the mill?" The factory owner is childless and he decides to perform a "Yajna". For twenty one days there is generous "annadana" (distribution of food to the poor.) On the eleventh day of the ceremony there is a special feast. One thousand children are to be given Sweet rice profusely enriched with ghee and jaggery. Raman's children also are among those who fill their stomach with this delicious 'payasa'. How do they know that their empty stomachs are too non-receptive after the prolonged starvation, and the digestive system is weakened? The rich food acts like poison. All of them are down with diarrhoea and start falling off like leaves in autumn. When they are being buried by the disconsolate parents, the rich couple are performing the ceremony of throwing delicious food-stuffs into the sacrificial fire in order to get rid of the consequences of their sin's in previous births! After the eldest of the ten, the last to die, is buried Raman's wife swoons upon the Small mound, the small abode they have built for their son's eternal rest. In utter despair and indignation he flings a curse at those incarnations of brutality: Let them be barren forever! At that moment a rhythmic slogan is heard from a distance:

*"Bury deep down your sorrows,
And rise up to strengthen your sinews!"*

The mother stands up wipes away the tears and looks: They are marching on, her own sons, thousands of them. And she feels a new strength. She repeats the slogan aloud. Raman holds her hand and follows them chanting the 'manthra'.

*Bury deep down our sorrows,
And rise up to strengthen our sinews!"*

The incident described in "The strike" smacks of a concoction of realities and exaggeration. The theme was actually concocted out of certain real experiences and certain imagined situations which the poet regarded possible and probable as natural conclusions. He had reports of a prolonged strike in a textile mill in Trichur, a town in the neighbouring state. One criticism levelled against the structure of the theme is that the poet painted the gruesome tragedy in such an incredible way that it betrays his unfamiliarity with the activities of Trade-unions and the way they functioned. The critics are obviously afraid that the tragic events might covertly suggest passivity or callousness attributable to the Trade union also. But the emotional thrust and the poetic intention leave no room for such interpretations, as they are clearly conveyed through the concluding lines in which the parents identify themselves with the comrades, their objectives, their spirit of dedication and their determination.

The second poem is a tiller's story of being a victim of exploitation by the land-lord. There are two annual harvests in Kerala the seasonal changes are in favour of the farmer in their normal way, one in February and the other in August. As rain's failed the farmers, Roman could not gather enough in February to remit to the landlord the measure of paddy fixed by lease. But he hoped to compensate in August. Rain's were merciful, then, and he worked hard. Expecting an extremely rich harvest, everyone in his house awaited anxiously fondling a dream of plenty. The housewife planned to purchase a new earthen pot for cooking the first meal with the fresh rice. The long awaited day dawned. Koman and his friends reached the paddy field early by day-break. And lo! The henchmen of the land-lord had already begun the harvest work! Koman and comrades were furious and literally pounced on them. Frightened they withdrew. But the official from the court was also there on the spot. He produced the 'order' from the court, empowering the

landlord to reap the crop entirely, as penalty for not paying the land-lord his due share of the previous harvest. Everybody knew that the tiller had no choice but to default the payment of the instalment as all his labour was lost due to drought. Yet the land-lord could secure an order from the hands of Law for the protection of his 'right'. Law was blind to the plight of the worker. Harvest or no harvest, he had no 'right' to default payment. A promise is a promise. Shylocks have right to their 'pound of flesh'. Koman understood that he would not get justice at the hands of law and realised that discretion is the better part of valour, in the form of instant resistance. His helpers were ready with their sharp Scythe to do anything to settle the affair in Koman's favour. But Koman was against violence and bloodshed which would be a successful vengeance for the time-being but would not fetch a permanent solution to the farmers' problems. The existing legal rules were against them and methods of violence would only result in their landing behind the bars. Koman was imaginative enough to realise that everything depends on legal authority and political power. He declares;

*"Harvest of power our concern first
Harvest of paddy comes only next"*

The earthen pot, purchased anew for the specific purpose of cooking the fresh rice, amidst all the Scythes lying idle in a row was indeed a picture of poignant tragedy. The title of the poem refers to this picture.

The political philosophy implied in the poem has been a matter of controversy. According to some critics, the agricultural labourers should have settled the matter then and there. But they forget that such spontaneous eruption of violence by small groups would not lead to the ultimate revolution, except contributing a few martyrs for the cause. The poet, whose daily experience as an advocates clerk demands stark realism in the depiction of such incidents, does not seem to think that creating a scene of blood-bath will be more conducive to his own views

of revolution. The peace loving farmers are generally law-abiding and behave like the hero of the poem on such occasions. To distort it to satisfy the dreams and theories of certain intellectual theoreticians was far from the poet's intention for the obvious reason that if farmers rise in revolt against land owners it ought to be a collective endeavour and not the adventure of an individual or a small group which is destined to misfire. The poet's exhortation through the words of Koman is that legislation can also be an effective means to achieve revolutionary changes. "Harvest of Power - our concern first" may be interpreted in two ways - Power through violence and power through legislative measures. The context points to the poet's predilection for the latter. It was the order from the court that made Koman ponder over the situation - Power is that which is capable of formulating laws, the source of such orders. If the class of people to which Koman belongs gains power in the Legislative forum they can change the laws in favour of the tillers. (To some extent, this is what happened in Kerala at a later stage when Land-Legislation-Act was passed) Edassery could foresee the land-reform measures. We must bear in mind that for the first time in the world the communist party came to power through the ballot in Kerala in 1957. It was during its short tenor that the act was passed. In spite of the Land reforms Act the tiller is not the owner of all cultivable land even now. During those days there were middle-persons between the land-lords and tillers, known as 'Pattakkutiyans'. Some of them were tillers too. In such cases they got ownership of land. But in the majority of cases the middle-persons came to be the owners. Thus the purpose of the act was only partly fulfilled. For the rest, only a change of guard has taken place. But tragic situations similar to that described in the poem have disappeared from the agrarian scene in toto, as an absentee-landlord will not now get the legal help from institutions of Justice to confiscate the crop even if the responsibility of production is solely of the tiller - Non-owner tillers are now agricultural labourers

entitled to fixed daily wages approved by trade unions. But Land reforms Act was not aimed at the transferences of ownership of the entire cultivable land to the tiller and therefore land — owners are still those belonging to the wealthy section of society. The former 'Janmis' were deprived of their landownership and consequently impoverished whereas the former lessees, who were to pay fixed portion of produce from land by way of rent to lessors, became wealthy owners of land. In effect equitable distribution of land to the tillers is still a far-off dream. The poem, for its inherent essential pathos, will have its impact on the receptive mind of the responsive reader whether exploitation of the weak by the strong is a contemporary reality or a thing of the past.

"Kalyanapputava' (The Wedding Dress) presents a picture of the pride valour and resourcefulness of the rural women confronted with sufferings due to abject poverty. Its original version was a grim tragedy but certain modifications were made while including it in the collection. It is a very strange situation and an extremely unusual turn of events that the poet had conceived in the original version. The occasion described is the visit of a would-be-bridegroom to see a proposed girl. She did not possess proper clothing to wear. The father left home early in the morning hoping to make enough money to purchase a saree. Mother had prepared a feast for the guests with whatever resources she had. When the father did not return in time for lunch the mother and the daughter got worried. Finally the mother decided to serve food. Custom required that the girl must appear on the scene for serving food. In her scanty clothes she was not in a presentable state. During meal time the searching eyes of the guests got sufficient hints. They waited for some time after taking food and grew suspicious. Finally one of them blurted out: "Enough of waiting we would like to see the girl". The mother was in a fix. But the girl saved the situation by saying "I do not like him. Then why should they bother to see me?". This she said in a brave voice, concealing the fact that she had, in reality,

immensely liked him, she wanted to save the pride and prestige of the family realising fully well that the words meant a supreme sacrifice. There ends the present version of the poem. When it was first published in a Souvenir (1951) there was a sequel to the story which goes as follows: The father returned late in the night. He brought a beautiful saree and a matching blouse. The girl gave a smile of satisfaction for the belated gift. But it was a very pathetic story that he had to narrate to his wife secretly. He had not succeeded in making money to pay for the clothes. In a desperate state of mind he stole a saree from a big shop in the town, but was caught red-handed. The shop keeper whipped the thief mercilessly, kept him tied up with a rope for the whole day and set him free in the evening. However, on hearing the man's sad story the shop keeper made a gift of the stolen thing to him. The girl overheard this and at night, wearing that saree she burnt herself to death. The opinion of a poet friend was that this sequel was unnecessary and so the poet deleted it.

Three other remarkable poems in this collection are 'Chakirikkuzhikal' (Pits for Coconut husks - 1950), 'Kutiyrakkal' (Eviction-1952) and 'Ennane neti' (How you won-1951).

The "pits" describes the hard labour of Coir-makers, those who are engaged in the work of separating fibres from coconut-husks. The husks are kept immersed in water for a number of days and then thrashed with a baton. This strenuous job is done mostly by women.

*"These brave sisters spin out the coir
Their sad labour the theme for my choir"*

The husks and these women have certain things in common. Both are left to decay. The golden fibres are used to manufacture several things that would add strength and beauty to the lives of the people. Similarly toils of these women are exploited for the happiness and comfort of those in the upper strata. The children of these women are brought up in unhealthy surroundings. Foul

smelling gases emanate from the pits and children grow breathing this polluted air. They are pale, rickety, and stricken with diseases due to malnutrition. Poverty, squalor and primitive living conditions in the villages among the downtrodden people were matters of sincerest concern for all the genuine writers of the period and these social realities were the factors that attracted Edassery to socialist ideologies rather than theoretical knowledge of the philosophy of dialectical materialism. Similarly one of the cruellest manifestations of legal rights, the 'eviction', executed with the support of law inspired the poet's moral indignation, as he had, on occasions, to be silent spectator of the atrocity perpetrated on the poorest of the poor making them destitutes. For him poetry was also an outlet for pouring out the heart-rending experiences and the righteous wrath. 'Eviction' is one of such poems. It echoes the loud cry of the destitutes all over the world who have no right to a sq. inch of land on the face of earth. The poet yearns of citizenship of an imaginary nation of these destitutes, a nation whose geographical boundaries are the isoglosses drawn joining the points of their dwelling places in every country.

'Ennane neti' (1951-How you won) is a hymn to the non-violent method adopted by Bharatmata for winning freedom. It proves beyond any doubt that the poet in his heart of hearts is a follower of the Mahatma and an ardent believer in the ultimate triumph of his non-violent methods. It again points to the fact that an amalgamation of Marxian ends and Gandhian means is the fondest dream cherished by the poetic mind. In the poem Mother India's immense capacity for suffering and tolerance against the cruellest forces of destruction, vengeance and violence, is extolled in an ecstatic mood of apotheosis:

*The mother hugged the guns that fired
And kissed the swords that whopped
Her merciful heart melted in Love
for the savage. His murderous mind
was overwhelmed and changed
He stood sobbing in remorse*

Another note worthy piece in this collection is an exhortation for the cause of Hindu-Moslem friendship. In Kerala, these communities have continued in peaceful coexistence for centuries except for an occasion during the Khilafat movement in 1921 in a limited area in Malabar. It started as an uprising against the British, but soon the rulers succeeded in diverting the Moslem fury against the Hindus through their powerful propaganda-machinery, convincing them that the Hindus en Masse rallied behind the British against the Moslems, and giving the impression to Hindus that religious intolerance of Moslems was risky. But for this tragic event no organised religious battles have been waged on the soil of Kerala. In the back-ground of the Partition of India and its horrible aftermaths in the North, the small poem, "The mighty mountain of Islam" (1950) breathes a refreshing breeze. It describes the fast friendship of two school-boys. One Hindu and the other Moslem. The former, the speaking voice of the poem, is a member of an aristocratic family. Despite the aristocracy he is half-starved as he does not go home for noonmeals either due to poverty or due to strict observance of customs. The Moslem boy, whose father owns a tea-shop, has his lunch at the shop and returns with a few plantain fruits, stealthily taken and concealed in his pocket, for his friend waiting under a tree not far away from the shop. One day the father caught his son red-handed and began questioning him. The boy would not answer. Father beat him severely repeating the question "for whom?". If the truth was revealed, the friend would feel insulted; his aristocratic pride and prestige would be wounded. The boy withstood the storm like a "mighty mountain" and saved his friend's honour and dignity. The grown-up fanatics deserve to take a lesson from this boy and then the message of brotherhood conveyed by the poem will create a stir in their minds. Child is indeed father of the man. Another poem enlogises the greatness of a leader Mohamed Abdu Rahman, who fought for the cause of freedom, was twice imprisoned and tortured; and became a martyr in the prime of youth. A long poem, "Towards perfection" (1951) deals with the

story of a literate girl who taught an illiterate young man to read and write. The man with a strong muscular body found joy in his hard work as a tiller. He was fascinated by a charming school girl, Sarala and whispered in her ears, one day, the words "Will you marry me?". The next day she passed on a piece of paper in which she had written the message that he should approach her guardians in the proper way. Illiterate as he was, he had to come to her again to know her mind. This time he asked her another question too: "Will you teach me the alphabet?" With the permission of her imaginative father, the lessons were started the next day. Thus his future-bride became his primary teacher. In Kerala girls were not discriminated against in the matter of imparting primary education even in olden days. Facilities for higher education increased in the first half of the century and girls got a good share of the learning opportunities. People in certain other regions of India might find the above story very strange but in the context of Kerala there is nothing improbable in the situation described. Actually, the situation is said to be the result of wishful thinking. The poet had an illiterate brother-in-law and his sister was educated. His sincere love compensated for everything and they were quite happy. Illiteracy was not considered an "imperfection" by her, but the poet's concept of "perfection" included equality in all respects and hence the wishful thought.

The next collection of poems "laghugananial" (Short songs) came in 1954. One significant poem in this collection is "Rishiyute dhenu" (The cow of the sage - 1945). Anything that the devotee wishes can be milked from the mythical cow of the sage. The spinning wheel of the Mahatma possess all the qualities of the Divine Cow. Worship of this cow and devotion to the duty of working hard for self-sufficiency will enable Indian people to rejuvenate themselves.

IV

POETIC WORKS - STAGES OF GROWTH

The next collection of poems, Karutha Chettichikal' (The black hawkerwomen) published in 1955, contains some of the best of Edassery. The Title poem (1951) contains a superb metaphor which identifies the black clouds and the black hawkerwomen arriving from Tamilnadu seasonally. In the Vedic concepts cows are identified with rivers as both are "Payaswinis" ('payas' means milk as well as water). In this poem the herd of reddish cows and the mineral-rich waters of "Peraru" (the great river) of Kerala are identified in a metaphor. The clouds driving these across the Sahya mountains resemble the black hawkerwomen from Tamilnadu. The array of these women wearing multicoloured sarees gives the illusion of a rainbow. Here in Kerala, the fields, like forlorn kids, lie in helplessness waiting for some one to turn up to feed them with the milk of kindness. With the open mouths (there are crevices due to dryness) they appear to be crying aloud; their rough curly hairs (dry stalks of plants of the previous crop) give the impression of destitutes - Like guardian angels these cloud-women come from the sky of Tamilnadu. Their breasts are full and brimming; ready to feed the crying hungry mouths of the fields in Kerala. The poem is an outright criticism of parochial regionalism and the metaphor comes in handy. The hawkerwomen from Tamilnadu arrive in seasons to find market for the several produces of their land. People of Kerala happily await them to purchase those produces at cheap rates. But they are not grateful enough to these toiling women, says the poet. They indulge in severe

criticism against the habits of these poor folk such as "lack of cleanliness". The poet puts forward a question for his own people to ponder over: "Who is more unclean?" On introspection they are bound to realise that there is only sheer snobbery behind such criticisms. According to the poet.

*"Nothing in this world so unclean
An Snobbery, the meanest of mean"*

More than a criticism on snobbishness the poem is a passionate plea for rising above parochialism and ethnic regionalism. In the present context when quarrels over right to riverwaters (Kaveri water dispute for example) pose serious threat to national integrity, this poem written fortyfive years ago (1951) is a clear testimony for the poet's farsighted and liberal views which transcend regional boundaries and narrow clannishness. The sky above belongs to all. Clouds from the sky of Tamilnadu reach the Western Ghats, the boundary separating the region from Karala, and the downpour from them make the rivers flowing Westwards, full and vibrant.

Another poem "Sister" (1952) has been widely acclaimed as the realistic analysis of a social problem.

A young girl in her very tender age is compelled by adverse circumstances to undertake the responsibility of mothering her younger brother. She brings him up sacrificing her own happiness. Her lovable qualities attracted a very sincere young man to her and she adored him. His frequent visits irritated the boy. He wanted to marry her but the boy did not want to share his sister's affection. He openly expressed his dislike for the Suitor. She was in a dilemma. It was a difficult task for her to choose between the lover and the brother. The small boy could not tolerate the presence of a third person between his sister and himself; he feared he would usurp all the affection of his sister and was not amenable to persuasion. Ultimately she made the choice. She preferred closing doors against her Lover and her future to hurting the tender feelings of the boy. She loved the man so deeply

that to live in the same place without ever seeing him was impossible. She decided to leave the place. She lacked the courage to bid him farewell. Leaving him in the dark about her plans, she "ran away" with her brother. In the new place where they settled, she brought him up properly looking after him and satisfying all his growing needs. He was given decent education and carefree life. He was not aware of the Source of income. Obviously it did not bother him. But idle tongues wagged as usual. One day he was shocked to overhear certain remarks of a sneering neighbour about the source of their income to meet the enormous expenses of his education. "Was it the oldest profession!" He was pained and confused. He questioned her and to his utter consternation he did not get a negative reply comforting him. She kept silence. And then everything was quite clear to him. Infuriated but not having voice to accuse he sat there like a stone. When she volunteered to leave for ever in order to save his honour and prestige he did not prevent her, but continued the stony silence. This took her memory back to that day when she shut the doors before the only golden opportunity that came her way. And now the person for whose sake she made the supreme sacrifice points an accusing finger against her. The irony of fate is depicted with remarkable poignancy in the poem. There are improbabilities and loopholes in the story as would be clear from its narration. But reading the poem, you experience only the emotional conflicts and not the rational connection of events, exactly as is the case with a mythical poem. The magic of poetic imagination is so effective in conveying the experience of tragic pathos in all its poignancy.

This collection includes one of the most renowned poems of Edassery "The Song of the Trickster-devil". It is based on a folk-tale of mythical character.

A five year old kid, the only child of a mother is going to the village-school. He has to cross a hill on his way. A cave on the hill is the dwelling place of Pootham (Bhutam - Trickster Devil). She is childless and craves

for motherhood. She sees the child and is enamoured of the boyish charm incarnate. The boy is equipped with an iron-stylet and palm-leaf for the writing exercises at the school. Anything made of iron is a repellant of evil-spirits. So she cannot touch the kid so long as he holds the stylet. She approaches him, talks endearingly; describes in detail all the heavenly pleasures he can enjoy if only he follows her to her abode, and persuades him to throw away all the materials he carried. Thinking of the instructions, mother had given, the boy resists the temptation but ultimately decides to follow the loving mother-like woman. He throws away the stylet and is instantly carried away by the Trickster to her cave. Evening comes; mother gets worried she goes in search of her darling assuming he lost his way. No where he is to be seen, neither in the fields nor on the hill. She screams in agony, calls out his name at top of her voice, crying and lamenting pitifully. Though the Trickster hears the screams she does not bother, but the screams grow so agonising that she is no longer able to turn a deaf ear. The Trickster assumes terrific forms like wildfire, whirlwind etc. and tries to scare the mother away. The mother withstands all the furies. The evil spirit ultimately tries to win her over by the greatest temptation on earth — enormous wealth. She tears away the upper crust of the Hill and shows the treasure house of diamonds and gold. All these will be in the mother's possession the moment she agrees to give away her child. The dazzle of the jewels and precious stones of all hues does not divert the mother's mind for even a second. She now realises what has happened to her child and is well aware of the intentions of the Devil. She insists that she would not lose her son for all the wealth on earth and heaven. She is not even prepared to glance at the treasure. Instead she does a terrible thing. She pierces out both her eyes; offers them as petals of red-lotus in worship of the supernatural Power and says:

*"Lo! much more than these is my darling precious
Give him back to me, be kind and gracious"*

Disarmed by the entreaty and the courageous self-sacrifice, the Trickster now tries to play a great trick, her last weapon. She tears off a small branch from a nearby thicket; creates a boy out of it and offers him to the blind mother. In great ecstasy she embraces him and pats on his head and instantaneously realises that she is cheated. What does the devil know of a mother's instinctive powers! Infuriated the hapless mother raises her hands up to throw a curse on the Devil saying "you try to cheat the womb that suffered the pangs of child birth.... you...." The Devil doesn't give her time to utter the curse. In a mement she produces the genuine boy and falls at the mother's feet begging for pardon. The mother is given back her eye-sight and is requested to see the boy for herself and be convinced. The Devil trembles in fear before the mortal human mother who instinctively forgets the harm done to her and generously forgives. Moreover, the Devil is given a standing invitation to visit their house in the harvest season every year when she will be given ceremonious reception and gifts too. But the mother did not tell her the proper location or other details of the dwelling place. Was it forgetfulness or was it a deliberate omission? Once bitten twice shy. Thus every year during the harvest season the "Pootam" comes to every house in the village, gets a share of the harvest, entertains the children of the house by lively dance and runs off to the next house. Is she still searching for the charming boy she once tried to possess?

In Kerala, the folk-dance in the name of "Pootam" is a prevalent custom performed with religious devotion every year during the harvest season. The face-mask of the dancer and other adornments are very attractive and designed with imagination and artistic insight. For children in the villages of Malabar this is an occasion for rejoicing. They enjoy the dance, the playing of the pipe and the particular tune which touches the inner Chords of the collective unconscious. The whole poem is revealed as the childhood memory of an elder sister on the occasion of a performance of the folk dance in the harvest season.

The descriptions of the mask the immensely big decorated crown made of palm-leaves, the colourful costumes made of cloths and palm leaves etc. in the poem are so realistic that the reader of any age turns out to be a kid enjoying the spectacular sight and the dance. The picturesque description of the whole performance gives the poem an extremely charming exterior. But it is the vision into the inner most emotional depth of the legend that endows the poem with an exquisite interior charm. The archetype of the great mother with her infinite capacity for self-sacrifice is awakened. The transformation of the Evil spirit has two-fold significance. Yearning for motherhood is the first transformational power by which she gets changed into a human mother benevolent and affectionate to the kid, with simultaneous retention of her dark nature which is capable of utmost cruelty to all others. The wrath of the human mother is the other transformational power, the thunders of which make her the meekest and the weakest of all beings and against which all her superhuman strength and destructive forces are futile.

Tearful incidents and humorous anecdotes found in the day-to-day life of ordinary people are equally made use of as raw materials for thought provoking poetic compositions. Often they contain a rare insight into the human drama. This feature is generally considered as a distinguishing quality of Edassery's poems. A few of such instances are to be examined here.

"Rakshappettuttal" (Rescuing-1952) is a story poem with a humorous vein. Prabhakaran is the ardent lover of Kalyani, daughter of a retired Inspector of Police. Though he is desperately in love with her, she is not fully convinced of his sincerity. He tells her he will die for his love and she will find his body floating on the waves of the sea the next day. He stands on the bridge protruding into the sea and takes the pose to plunge into the waves.

Madhavan arrives on the spot and seizes him from behind. Prabhakaran pretends anger at the whole world

which will neither let live nor let die. From the words Prabhakaran blurted out, Madhavan gets the right impression that the suicide-bid was not genuine. Prabhakaran just wants to get a witness for his attempt, who can be used in his endeavours to get the girl's sympathy. Madhavan agrees to collaborate in hatching a plan to hoodwink the girl. Together they will have a dip in the waters and straightaway go to her house, the nearest one on the beach. Madhavan will convincingly present the story of the attempted suicide of Prabhakaran and his own providential arrival on the scene just in time for the rescue. The scheme of action is cleverly executed - Madhavan's deed of heroism highly impresses the girl's father. The narration of the incident is so cleverly done that among the listeners none except the girl gets a hint of the real intention which is carrying out the previous day's threat. The father suggests that the heroic deed of Madhavan is to be reported to the authorities so that his name will be recommended for a highly deserved reward. Madhavan opposes the idea in all magnanimity saying such recognitions go against the unselfish spirit of service and sacrifice and in this case, he does not like to embarrass his friend by the eventuality of legal procedure for suicide attempt. Prabhakaran admires his friend's sincerity and generosity. Convinced that the girl's sympathy is sufficiently aroused, he leaves the house, in full hope that his friend will do the rest of persuasion. Madhavan stays on and cleverly turns the girl's mind in his favour. She obviously prefers a real hero to a weak minded fellow. Somebody who has the courage to live for her and protect her is more covetable than the coward who embraces death rather than life. The next day Prabhakaran goes to the beach to meet the repentant girl at the usual spot. There he finds her in the company of his friend whose role appears to be more than that of a well-wisher. He conceals nothing and coolly begins to describe the reasons for the change of his role. Unable to swallow this breach of faith he reveals to the girl the real nature of the drama they enacted. It is the friend's turn now to defend himself. With characteristic ingenuity he concocts the

story of rescuing and express his readiness to demonstrate his skill to perform the heroic deed and challenges Prabhakaran to jump into the rough sea. The girl is quite excited at the suggestion and welcomes the idea, not to judge their comparative merit or sincerity but just to enjoy the sight of their swimming and struggling in the rough waves of the sea!

Another poem 'makante vasi' (Stubbornness of a Son 1953) gives the picture of the genuinely affectionate nature of a father concealed in an apparently rough exterior. Obsessed by the prejudices resulting from a family fend, the father has branded the members of another family as his arch enemies and gives specific instruction to his son not to have any truck with them in any circumstance. But cupid knows no ban. The son falls in love with a girl of the very forbidden house. The news shocks the father but in the battle of emotions affection for his son wins. Concealing his own pains, the father condescends and is prepared to send an agent on his behalf to seek the girl's hand for his son. But this does not satisfy the son. He resents the half-hearted permission and the lukewarm attitude. He stubbornly declares that he will remain a bachelor if his father deems it disgraceful to approach the bride's people and seeks the assistance of a 'non-entity' to 'beg' for his son's bride. Ultimately the father surrenders and the son's stubbornness wins. The narration of the incident is in the nature of a dialogue between the father and a friend whose company he seeks for the 'happy' occasion of visiting the girl's people. The father reveals that what overwhelms his heart is the feeling behind the stubbornness of his son - the feeling of recognition of father's supremacy; it is the force behind the transformation of the father's mind. The humorous colloquial style and the dramatic narration give a rare charm to the poem.

In such narratives the poet's philosophy seems to be that all is well that ends well. But in real situations of life, all does not end well, as we already saw in the poem 'Sister'. Yet life is a curious mixture of tears and smiles

and the poet is generally attracted to such instances. 'Mother and wife' (1954) is the story of the zest for life among the ordinary folk. Damodaran and Kalyani are a happy couple. She gives birth to ten children in quick succession. Life flows as 'sound of music' in the cottage. But fate is cruel to them. The master of the house is snatched away from them. The widow and the orphaned kids have nothing to lean upon and nothing to look forward to. The poverty-stricken house is forgotten and deserted by all. One evening an old man walks in with a request to get the bag of rice he brought cooked for him. She obliges. But before the food is served, the searching eyes of the man discover certain sad facts and is overwhelmed by knidness. He feigns sudden illness and excuses himself at the meal-time. The next morning he asks for her permission to stay on. She, the mother of ten children, expresses no objection. Thereafter the man works for them. The new purpose of life in the new circumstance regains for him his youthful energy and will-power. He lives with her and becomes a guardian angel for the children, whom he looks after as his own offsprings. Ultimately his day also arrives. Now the children are strong and grown up. When the father of her children passed away she had not wept. Motherhood which was first and foremost in her mind persuaded her to work and not to weep. This time she could not help crying, for, now she is the "weak wife" and not "the strong mother". The theme appears to be the result of a mere 'day-dream' or wishful thinking, but the poem has succeeded in the suspension of disbelief the credit for which goes to the imaginative power and the true creative talent of the poet.

The story of "Paru, the paddy pounder" (1954) takes you from the heights of Romantic imagination to the 'down-to-earth realities' of life. Paru went daily to a wealthy man's house for pounding rice. As wages she got a measure of rice every day and that was how she looked after her ailing mother and the younger brother. She had to reach home before dusk; before night "darkened" the

sky, as a ruffian darkens the "Mana" (Sky; Honour) of a virtuous girl. On a certain day she was going home after work. She quickened her paces as she heard the sound of foot-steps from behind. The next moment she was in the clutches of a scoundrel. She literally fought with tooth and nail, cried aloud and somehow wriggled out of his grip but lost the measure of rice she bundled on one end of her upper cloth as usual, along with the cloth. But obviously his aim was not rice. The next morning she saw the bundle of rice in front of her house, thereafter she became afraid of going to that house alone. The ruffian might make his appearance any moment from behind the bushes on the way. So she was accompanied by her younger brother who proudly walked in front taking great pleasure in his newly attained position as her body-guard. The very thought of the red-eye of the rowdy, his frightening moustache, and his fiery look was sickening. Whenever that abhorrent image rose in her mind's eye she started to remember the face of her benefactor who gave her the daily wages, the bundle of rice. What an admirable personality and how magnanimous a mind. The man was the hero of her dreams, nay her very God ! Her disgust for the ruffian and admiration for this grace-incarnate were equally unbounded. She heard news that the wealthy man was going to invest money in industries. The whole village was going to be a paradise, she dreamt. The bushes on her way were cut off, the whole area was being prepared for industrial purposes. He was starting a rice-mill too. All this made her happy. But the far reaching implication of the rice-mill was grasped only in the final hour when she was told that her services were terminated as the rice mill would be there to do the job of pounding. It was a shock to her. The god whom she worshipped had usurped her daily rice-bundle for ever, where as the ruffian had snatched it off only once and that too he had returned. Shattered and broken she returned from the house and for the first time she felt no fear for the unsophisticated fellow. Her eyes hopefully searched for him. Though his physical appearance was repulsive.

probably he possessed a beautiful soul capable of extending protective care. So this time when he approached her she did not resist and she found herself within his stretched out arms.

The callousness behind the pretended graciousness and magnanimity of the upper class is one of the emotional dimensions stressed in the poem. Another factor is the ironical consequence of the apparently "progressive" measures. None can dispute the fact that industrial development generally mean progress for the whole community. But there are certain circumstances where even this might prove detrimental to the interests of some unfortunate beings. Human environments and values vary. There are no absolute rules applicable to all time and all place. Individuals are important and have to be reckoned first. The poet's humanist philosophy is comprehensive. In the totality of social welfare, the individual is not to be ignored. Industrialisation should aim at the welfare of the whole community but should not be detrimental to the employment opportunities of the down trodden

The poet is always on the side of the suffering humanity. The "Still sad music of humanity" stirs the inner chord and then the inner voice is the supreme guide-Ideological Concepts or theories devoid of humanism fail to inspire the poet.

V

HUMANIST PHILOSOPHY

"When Ideologies Slumber" is the name of another collection of poems published in 1961. It contains eighteen poems. The title poem written in 1956, to which a reference is already made in Chapter I, is apparently the story of a Village-girl. But its covert, meaning is a severe criticism of the escapist tendencies in political and sociological fields. The need of the time is a drastic reconstruction of the social set up aimed at the liberation of the downtrodden, especially those who suffer silently. This section includes the vast majority of Indian women whose liberation is a forgotten theme even in the camps of the revolutionary political parties. The girl who elopes with a lover whose eligibility is not tested or proved, symbolically stands for the oppressed downtrodden masses. As already pointed out, they choose the husband (Bharta-The Ruling Power) with neither conviction nor confidence. When those, who are responsible for her security and welfare, are either indulging in squabbles or are indifferent, then the girl has to choose the only way open before her. Similarly the Vote catches get the votes of the people whether they deserve to be rulers or not. The girl closes the doors of the house without making noise for fear of awakening the sleeping "protectors." This caution "not to make noise" is highly suggestive. The illiterate masses take a blind plunge into unknown future and in this process they are unable to awaken those who are supposed to awaken them. When Nora (Ibsen's character) closed the doors behind her, the noise was heard throughout Europe, they say. The poet hopes that

the voiceless protest of the girl will create thundering echoes at least in the minds of the thinking minority.

"To the other house " (1957) is a dig at false sense of prestige and snobbishness of the wealthy, particularly of the upstarts. A wealthy young man seeks the hand of the daughter of a poor man attracted by her beauty. For the poor family it is a bolt from the blue, quite happy and welcome, and they ignore the only condition put forward by the man - no more visits by anyone from the bride's house. Years roll on. The loving parents feel the unquenchable thirst to see their darling just for once. Finally the father sets out putting aside all apprehensions. The old man sees his son-in-law in the portico of the palatial house in the company of two highly respectable persons. The son-in-law recognised the old man but his expression does not convey a message of welcome. The girl coming out at the moment also sees the father but does not utter a word grasping the meaning of her husband's expression. The Visitors read embarrassment in their mutual glances and are inquisitive about the unwelcome intruder. Putting on the airs of a man of generosity the house owner asks his wife to give something to the fellow taking him to the back yard. With a strange look of apology and grief, stands the stunned daughter, who hears the comforting words of the resourceful father: "Sorry, I have lost my way; I was to have dropped in at the other house." The father walks away with heavy steps into the weary way that awaits him.

"Wedding gift" (1958) is the tragic story of a girl who commits suicide on being cruelly deceived by her lover, who wooed her for a pretty long time but ultimately preferred to marry her younger sister. She finds no meaning in living but at the same time cannot hurt the feelings of her sister by a proclaimed suicide making matters obvious. She devices a plan to make it appear an accident in the eyes of all except the man who knows that she has enough reasons to commit suicide. On the morning after the wedding she goes to the pond to take bath. For company she takes her younger brother to the

pond and tells him to sit on the steps watching when she takes a plunge to pluck a lotus flower. The innocent five-year old kid is particularly instructed to tell the brother-in-law, in case he asks, that she got into the deep waters to pluck the lotus-flower in order to give a proper wedding-gift to the newly wedded couple. She asks the kid to keep on smiling. To see his innocent smile is her greatest happiness. Even the mother had started using harsh words recently not because she hates the daughter but because of her over anxiety regarding the unmarried elder sister. In this circumstance the only solace left for her is the Kid's innocent smile. She will go step by step into the pond and when she is neck-deep in water she will turn her face and then she wants to see the smiling face of the boy.

The poet depicts the agony of a deserted girl who is denied love and care in such a heart rending way that one is made to forget general theories connecting cowardice and suicide. The picture of the boy waiting for a flower from the other world is indeed drawn in cruel colours, but it intensifies the poignancy.

In the poem 'Varadanam' (Gift-of God 1958) the sequence of an event in the life of Lord Krishna is visualised. We read the story of the hunch-back of Mathura being converted into a beautiful damsel among the wonders worked by Krishna.

In this poem a sequel to the story is related. After the transformation the girl can never be the same old hunch-back mentally. Now desires and hopes are kindled in her mind. As a hunch-back she was formerly reconciled to her destiny - the position of a mere hand maid, one born to serve others and a victim of universal aversion. But the physical transformation has opened a new world before her. She is transformed mentally too. But there is none to recognise her mental transformation. She is elevated to the status of a Lady for all outward appearances. But every body entertains abhorrence inwardly for her as she belongs to the low class by birth.

At the same time she is not one among the low class either. The appearance of a Lady elicits respect and worship from the ordinary people not intimacy or companionship. Thus she becomes an alienated one not belonging to either class. Mother is worried that the family has lost its bread winner; Father is worried that his daughter is alienated. She is a restless soul finding none to quench her new yearnings. But how can the person responsible for her transformation disown her? This is the problem presented by the poet. Probably no other poet in India has applied his imagination to the conflicting psychological situation in the life of this Puranic character in such a way. The poet is concerned with the consequences of transformations in general; the plight of the hunchback is only a representative instance. Transformations bring in responsibilities on the authors of such deeds and they have no right to shy away from them. The story of "Kuliga" is told in an extremely imaginative way envisaging certain dramatic situations. One day after the slaying of Kamsa, Balarama and Krishna are playing chess. The girl ventures to appear before them and present her problems with a request to kindly do the needful to solve them. Her beauty as well as her deep distress causes emotional disturbance in Krishna who as a result makes foolish mistakes in the chess-movements. Balarama, though Conservative in his attitudes to life, has great psychological insight and assesses the magnitude of Krishna's righteous dilemma and his sentimental attachments in the proper perspective. He finds out the solution in no time; quotes rules from "Smriti" permitting marriage between the ruling community and the women of their choice. The best of women and the best of jewels are alike for possession. When minds agree no obstruction is valid. He benevolently gives Krishna his wholehearted support for marrying the girl. He compares the former transformation of the girl to a transplantation. The man with his inseparable plough talks the language of a typical farmer. He who did the transplantation of a Creeper has the responsibility to arrange proper support for its growth.

"Kavile Pattu" ("The Song of the Sacred grove" 1966) is the most celebrated of Edasseri's collections. It won the national award from Sahitya Akademi in 1970. The title poem "Kavile Palter" has a folk-tale for its theme. In a brief introduction to the poem, the poet mentions an indelible experience of his childhood. The inspired dance of the Oracles in the temples of Mother goddess was a common sight in Kerala in those days. During the 'Jalappoli' festivals in the temple the Oracle in sanguine dress with Sword in one hand and chilampu (anklet) in the other used to perform frenzied dance while leading the procession. The ritual also included the bloody sight of the oracle striking on his own head with the sword. After giving the Mother's message to the people he used to swoon on the floor, dripping blood. Ashes and turmeric powder used in the worship of the mother goddess would be applied to the wound which would heal up in a few days. It is this ritual that acted as the nucleus of the poem. The story goes thus. There was an aristocratic family of worshippers of the Great Mother. The only boy in the house, a fourteen year old warrior, was returning from the "Kalari" (Military gymnasium) after regular exercises, to his house. On the way is the "Kavu" (The sacred grove) of the Devi. There he finds the Mother Devi in a blood-thirsty mood. She asks him to quench her thirst with his young blood. He has no hesitation at all. True to the tradition of the family of devotees he takes a quick dip in the temple-tank, worships the mother and chops off his own head for her to drink the blood and quench her thirst. It was noon-time when this great sacrifice was made, its impact spread over the whole Universe. At the very moment the sun was completely eclipsed and stars appeared in the sky. The mother of the boy felt that something terrible had happened and she set out in search of her son. She perceives the Great mother, still in her blood thirsty horror inspiring mood and the body of her son. Without losing her courage or composure the human mother puts this question to the goddess:

For seven years I did penance and got married.
For Seven years I did penance and gave birth to my son.

For seven years my breasts fed him and nurtured.
For seven years he learned the art of wielding the sword.

Now tell me Mother, did his hands tremble when he wielded the sword?

Certain I am, he wouldn't thus cause blemish upon his noble lineage.

My son wouldn't thus humiliate his mother's womb.

These words did fall on her like real, blows of swords. From then onwards the Great mother never expressed her blood thirst; instead she shed her own blood to save the devotees however erring they were. Was it remores or was it mercy? One thing is certain. She turned her horrible cruelty against her own self.

This interpretation of the ritualistic the performance has a touch of the Christian concept of the saviour suffering for the souls to be saved. Sacrifice as an archetypal phenomenon is the unconscious powerhouse that generates the mysterious magnetic force attracting all responsive minds to the poem.

The above summary Communicates only the theme and the philosophic vision of the poet in his imaginative interpretation of the ritual. Obviously, nature of the theme is only one of the factors that make a poem a marvellous success. In this particular instance, the emotion-charged imagery, the soulstirring music the picturesque description of life and the religious faith of the ancient village folk, presentation of the temple - rituals with minute details, are among the several factors that make this poem a unique aesthetic experience. It has to be pointed out, however, that the absence of realism in the mythical legend has not in any way adversely affected the aesthetic value of the poem. The suspension of disbelief in complete

It is to be specially remembered that the author does not belong to the clan of conventional "believers" who are

not bothered by rationalism. This emphasises the fact that Archetypes in the collective unconscious overpower the creative individual minds and enable them to create superb forms of art (poem, sculpture or painting) irrespective of the predilections of the conscious part of their Psyche. C.G.Jung has made this observation: "whoever speaks in Prime or deal images (archetypes) speaks with a thousand voices. "This poem makes us realise what is really meant by the "thousand voices" the "cry of the blood".

One of the other remarkable poems in this collection is "The shepherd of King Bimbisara " (1964) It is in the form of a dramatic monologue. The thoughts of the shepherd while he is driving the herd to the palace of the king and his reactions at the most unexpected turn of events after Lord Buddha confronted the priests at the sacrificial ground are expressed in a monologue. While driving the herd he is touched by the pathetic plight of a mother-goat. She wants to take equal care of her two lambs. One an energetic kid, and the other a lame one. (Reference has already been made to this poem in the first chapter). The shepherd's references to his own mother have a particular relevance apart from the homage paid to the selfless sacrifices which the mother has to make in the animal world including the homosapiens. It is the presence of motherhood that is felt by all whenever and wherever the milk of mercy flows. Lord Buddha is merciful to the animals and gets for them a new lease of life. It is, therefore, the privilege of these animals alone to know his greatness and his divinity in the deepest sense. Others admire him from a distance, but they feel his protective care and affection as a child in its mother's lap. While driving them to the Sacrificial ground the shepherd is overwhelmed with pity for the mothergoats concern and for the enthusiasm of the herd in their blissful ignorance of the cruel fate awaiting them. When they reach the destination, they instinctively realise what is going to happen and at the right moment the saviour appears.

There is a symbolic meaning in the sense of relief

felt by the sacrificial animals and the prophetic mercy of the saviour. The relief felt by the downtrodden, the oppressed and the lowest in the caste system and the immense concern Gandhiji had for them, and at the same time the skin-deep admiration exhibited by the upper class and upper caste for the Mahatma are implied here. Those belonging to the latter section are stunned, stupefied and scared for the time-being. They desist from performing the "Sacrifice" for that reason and not because of a genuine mental transformation. But what the former section achieved is nothing short of a resurrection as it is a second life for the lambs and goats. The poet says that the realisation of this truth is the result of his close observation of the attitudes, behaviour and expressions of certain "high-ups" whom he happened to serve as a dependent during his childhood.

Motherhood has a holy shrine in the poet's deep psyche. In the same collection, there is a poem "Wind and Light" (1959) in which Nature's care and concern for motherhood and childhood are described as the most wonderful phenomenon in the universe. The message is conveyed by a young mango tree, fully blossomed in the spring. A devastating thunderstorm occurs at night and huge trees are uprooted. But in the morning, contrary to the apprehension regarding the state of a young tree, it stands there all smiles and no tears. At this the speaking voice exhorts:

*"O Weakness! when thou attains motherhood
Even the arch enemies are there
Not to kill, but to swing the cradle
of the darling babe; Thy word is the Order'
the order of the universe
No, not I, to be surprised if the Ocean Waves
mount up as strong walls
for a mother to deliver her baby in the seas
And, the leaping flames become fairy nurses
to protect suckling babies in the Wilderness.*

Edassery is, by nature, endowed with a temperamental

affinity for the travails of the creative individual and of the labouring section; but it does not mean that he assumes a pessimistic view of life. On the contrary, he upholds the ultimate triumph of human will, the positive progressiveness of human endeavours which will lead him to invariably the right path in spite of the innumerable errors he makes from time to time. In the poem, "Change the trodden Paths" (1959), his exhortation is to abandon all the conservative views, ways and means. Though he is not against traditional Indian values, fundamentalism of any sort and conservatism are, in his eyes, detrimental to growth and progress. In a humorous vein he welcomes the enterprising nature of man who is dreaming of "starting an oil company in one of the planet-neighbours like Mars, Venus and Jupiter". He taunts the poet by asking him if his speed of imagination is overtaken by that of the 'Sputnik'. He visualises a funny dialogue between Narada and Parvathy in Heaven. The former is in a state of hallucination. He tells the latter that his water-bowl rolled off along the sands of the Milkyway and seeks the latter's help to retrieve it. Parvathy laughs at the folly and tells him that it is a satellite, a huge ring with clockwise grooves meant for Sun-God, made by the newly awakened man of the earth!

"Markandeya" is probably the most powerful symbol in the whole of Indian Mythology of the undaunted will-power of man. The story of Markandeya is on every grannie's lips for every attentive child in the Ponnami region. Legend has it that Markandeya the boy conquered the God of Death at the temple of Siva in "Trippvangottu" which is near Edassery's own native village. There was a banyan tree in front of the temple which possessed a very curious shape. It looked as though one tree was split into two leaving ample space in between for a person to pass. The legend goes that when Markandeya came running to seek refuge at the Lord's feet, he saw the huge tree blocking his way. Yama mounted on his bull was close upon his heels. There was not a moment to waste. To take a turn to left or right would be to jump into

the rope-noose of yama. Markandeya threw himself mentally at the feet of the Lord and lo ! the tree was instantaneously split into two, making a cleavage for the boy to run straight to the feet of the idol in the temple. The poet's mother would narrate the story everytime they went to the temple pointing to the strange banyan tree. Infact every boy of the locality might have imbibed this story with his mother's milk in his childhood. The poet's undaunted faith in the ultimate victory of human determination and will owes much to the spiritual influence of this legend, usually narrated not as an old tale but as a real occurrence, testified by the split tree. We see from the poem, 'Markandeyan' (1964) how deep was the influence exerted by the myth on the mind of the poet in the growing stage. In the poem, Markandeya is not just one individual, but Man who seeks immortality. The primitive man who lanced to death the wild animals could not conquer the 'Mahisha' (bull) of Yama. His prowess was futile confronting the wild beast of death. The ancient sages who composed hymns to please the gods, sang their praise in thousand voices to conquer the fear of death if not death itself. Great civilizations rose but gradually declined and finally fell. None of the warriors and conquerors of the world could defeat death. This long history is there to intimidate Man whenever he ventures on the path to immortality. Death is close behind; he can even feel the proximity of the sharp nails meant to penetrate into his flesh. Seated on his globe Man roams the space in the faint hope of out running Time. Like two interfering mediators, Sun and Moon, appear to be helping to put a halt to the fight, now catching now wriggling out, but their attempts are futile. Dawns and Dusks run away in mortal fear; The fringes of their colourful sarees are seen flying in the heights. Man sees before him at this juncture a huge banyan tree; its branches are spread out into the vast space of the universe; the branches are reinforced and supported by thousands of downward sprouts spreading roots in the earth. Beyond this tree is the abode of the ultimate truth incarnate. What is this tree that obstructs Man's vision

and blocks his way? The poet identifies the tree with the sense of diffidence and despair that Man faces in crucial moments. Two paths are there, one leading to inaction and the other to increasing vigour. Man's willpower will lead him to the path of vigour. All the obstructions are to be split into pieces, thus leading him along the one true path. In the legend the God gives assurance to the human mother that though her son will live only upto sixteen years, that "sixteen" will be an eternal sixteen. The evolution of man cannot be an exercise in futility in the cosmic pattern. The poet's argument is that annihilation of the race cannot be the ultimate purpose of Nature in the creation of Man and in the process of his evolution. For this, the assurance given by the Eternal Destroyer, SIVA to the mother of Markandeya, is quoted as ample proof.

In the two collections, "When ideals give slumber" and "The Song of the Sacred grove" of the sixties, humanistic view of life is emphatically upheld by the poet. Spirituality and materialism are no longer conflicting forces. They can be amalgamated into one value Concept if human welfare and human progress are the ultimate motives. The Conflict between the human classes poses a graver problem, because of the clash of interests which cannot be wished away. The interests of the oppressive class cannot be safeguarded if the sufferings of the oppressed are to be alleviated. Thus far the means envisaged by the, Marxist philosophy are acceptable. Violence may be unavoidable at times as the parasitic growths are to be weeded not. The farmer's pragmatism is the rationale behind it. This is the theme of the poem "mullam cheera" (wild plant). But this view does not drag the poet away from the path of humanism. Humanist values such as Love Mercy and forgiveness are to be cherished. Revenge and bloodshed are not deemed as the only solution. This kind of philosophy is generally known as Marxian humanism. It is neither a deviation from the past nor a negation of the past, but only an extension, expansion and evolution of it. It is bearing from lessons and growing to better ways.

VI

CONCLUSION

Hodding carter has said that "There are only two lasting bequests we can hope to give our children: one is roots; the other wing". Edassery's progressive views were meant to give wings to those who would look up to poets for guidance and his respect for Indian heritage was meant to strengthen the roots of faith in the country's hoary past. In the words of Edmund Burke, "People will not look forward to posterity who never look backward to their ancestors". When Gandhiji looked backward to the ancient Indian sages and found the necessary guidelines for the modern world in Geetha, he was certainly not averse to the well-being of posterity. Edassery realised this. His poems, on close analysis, are not against Indian tradition of tolerance and forgiveness which were upheld well within certain limits, as is explicit from the very Gita. War is of course the last resort when all the peaceful means prove failure beyond redemption. Therefore the humanist philosophy of Edassery with its Marxian touch, is not at logger heads with the Gandhian approach. In the collection of poems, "oru piti nellikke, (A handful of gooseberries-1968) the title poem(1966) contains deliberations on the past and the future Gooseberrie are a sort of sour-bitter fruits; The taste may be slightly repellant to the palate at first but the fruits have great medicinal qualities as their name in Sanskrit(Amrita) indicates. They turn sweet afterwards. The fruits are here a symbol of the bitter experiences faced by the present generations. The poet is optimistic; he envisages a future in which bitterness will wither away and a dawn of light and Sweet music will follow. The Poet exhorts those who lament over the

bitter present to think of the more bitter immediate past. If food-grains are not sufficient in the country "at present", the young generation has to work hard in the soil, which now belongs to them. In the independent India there should not be any impediment between men and hardwork. He reminds those who indulge in idleness that this was precisely what had prolonged slavery and foreign domination. The British bought burmese rice to feed the people; and rice was rather cheap. Six pies (pie-a copper coin; 192 pies being one Rupee) were enough to buy one meal but people had the capacity to buy only one meal in six days! The fertile land of Country was not properly cultivated; people went to the Rubber Estates of Malaya to make a living-like cattle they were driven to alien lands. Children were taught to sing in praise of the British king who ruled the Empire where the Sun never set. Those children grew up and started thinking on a different line, for which they were thrown to the gallows. 'When the bitter present irritates you, think of this bilterest past. "This is the Poet's adortee in this Context he draws the picture of a giant among men, a little figure growing bigger and bigger filling the vast universe. He too fell struck from behind. Yet his voice echoes in every ear". Don't go back to the brute, thou art to became divine. Once you slip back into the brute's past, all is lost. Do realise the value of freedom lest you should lose everything that was earned the hard way' - this is the message of the poem and it is conveyed by none other than Gandhiji. In the matter of value concepts the poet is a follower of Gandhiji. According to the poet he was an ideal exponent of Indian heritage and the absence of Such leaders in the recent past is the cause of the downfall of the nation. This is the meaning of the question posed in the poem 'Karuvarundo'? (Is there a blacksmith? - 1969) In the poem, the nation is Conceived as an ancestral house, an abode of invaluable treasures. But it was never bolted from within-the treasures were kept open to all. But they remained unknown and untaken because during the middle ages questers were hand tied by regressive forces. The handcuffs are to be shaken off which is easy as they

are made of cast iron and are rusty. They are to be melted in the Powers of thinking and the steel is to be used not for making fetters but shining ornaments for the minds feet. This can be effectively done by none except an expert blacksmith. But where can we find him? What we need is not new philosophies or ideologies, but true intellectual leaders who can rightly interpret the ancient texts and lead us to glory and fulfilment.

There are two poems in this volume which require psychological analysis. Certain strange aspects of love are drawn with exquisite dexterity and suggestiveness. The deep structure of Sentiments depicted in the poems is such that one would hesitate to call them love-poems. Yet they really are. one is *Over Gandharvan patunum*. (A Gandharva Sings - 1966) and the other is 'Varalmanninte nandi' (Gratitude of the Dry soil-1967)

In the former the Speaking self undergoes a transformation. The innermost thoughts of the speaking self are relayed as the song of a Gandharva (a supernatural being) sitting on a tree in proximity. The situation is this: One day the speaking self reaches the residence of a noble lady whom he adored in childhood. The social status of the lady was too high in those days for the boy to mix his adoration with any mundane sentiment of sensuous love. Yet love it was in the most sublime form. It was like the yearning of the moth for the star. The girl got married to a person of equal status. The man left her after sometimes. No body knew why. She waited and pined for him. But he never returned. Why was the marriage broken? It was a mystery that worried the speaking self. She had regained her Composure after some time. Being a beauty queen, suitors came so many. But she gave no to all and stood firm. Yet she was not adamant in her liking for solitude. Visitors were not unwelcome and she used to put on a smiling expression. This gave room for unfounded rumours. The speaking self had nothing but a pious admiration for the lady. One day he visited her and stayed on for the night. She was hospitable but after the supper it was made

clear that he was to sleep in the outer verandah. The doors were closed behind him. It was raining heavily outside and the chill was rather hard to bear. He was lying there thinking of the past, the good old days when she appeared before him as an angel of beauty and goodness. Suddenly he felt like hearing a celestial Song. It appeared to be coming from the top of a mango tree in the yard.

What he heard as the song of a Gandharva was actually his own thoughts. Yet he wouldn't recognise it to be so. This is the metamorphosis referred to above. His own former self is singing as a Gandharva. Gandharvas are lovers and musicians. The Poet cum lover in the speaking self assumes the existence of the Gandharva into whose being a transmigration of soul takes place. The lady's unblemished character, virtues nobility unexpressed yearnings, deep sorrow, perplexity at the undeserved desertion and above all the sense of void that tortures her are all described by the Gandharva who is a silent witness of everything. When his own otherself reveals the greatness in her to his baser self which in a few weak moments was hopeful of getting a more intimate Companionship, the admiration grows deeper and the friendship more sincere. As the title of the poem appropriately suggest, it is indeed a song celestial. The breath-taking expectation of the baser self that the door will be opened at any moment, in the excuse of giving shelter to the guest from the thunderstorm, gradually dies out. But he is amazed that there remains neither dejection nor hatred as the dominating emotion, but an extremely sublimated form of benign love, a spiritually purifying state of mind. The novelty of poetic images, the inner cadence and perfection of Suggestive language make the poem one of the excellent creations of the poet.

The latter one is outwardly an ode on Summer Rains. But the erotic images used profusely in the poem make it a story of love affair between the dry soil and the Beauty that is Rain, Earth the Dry soil, desperately waits for her in sleepless separation. And then in the cover of darkness

she secretly appears. The union between them is described in such erotic language and images that a human love-play in minutest details is unveiled. The rain is depicted not as a virgin damsel but as one who has generously given to many the experience of bliss. She is regenerating happiness for others unmindful of her own degeneration. It is depicted as a supreme self-sacrifice. Dry soil, the speaking self, cherishes his own experience as the greatest achievement and heavenly bliss, though just for once.

The baser self of the first poem has his expectation realised in the situation of the second poem. Probably a sequel to the psychological situation in the former had to be imagined and pictured, in order to restore equilibrium and equanimity in the inner world of the speaking self.

An entirely different emotional factor can be seen in another remarkable poem in the volume namely 'His will' -(1969). It is the description of a dream in which a dog asks the speaking self, who is actually an advocates clerk, to prepare a proper will ' for him. Instructions is given to leave provision for payment of eight annas to 'that person who would one day trap me and kill'. Eight annas - because that was the rate of payment by the municipality. The dog has only sympathy for the human being who has to do such mean jobs to make a living. Actually the poem is a satire. The dog stands for creative writer and he killer man for the critic whose real motive is earning his bread. The poet has no grudge against the critic who writes dispartagingly about his work. Vitriolic criticism is more paying and the critic, when he fails to understand poetry writes criticism as he wants to earn whatever he can by means foul or fair. His plight is Compared in the poem to that of the dog-catcher. The poem is a scathing criticism on the irresponsible criticism by those whose sensibility and responsiveness to poetry are questionable. But unlike this vituperative attack on critics, whom he called gods, this poem is a sciritillating combination of humour and originality.

The next collection of poems 'Thrivikramannu Mumpil (Facing Thrivikrama - 1971) Contains twenty three poems representing all the important traits already appeared in the works of the Poet. The title poem was first published (1968) under different crest, 'Vamanannu Mumpil.' Though Vamana and thrivikrama mean the same, their etimological differences Signify different aspects. Vamana' is dwarfish whereas 'Thrivikrama' is the cosmic figure that could measure out the whole globe in one pace (Vikrama - pace). Though the story of the Divine decept' is not altered, the way mahabali looks at it is different in the poem. The Great universe is the God, Vishnu Before him any mighty human being is infinitesimally insignificant. A righteous person is naturally Confounded when he is Condemned and finished on the basis of unfounded allegations. Such is the situation Mahabali finds himself in when he is deprived of the throne and thrown away into the netherland. The allegations against him are utterly baseless.

*'for thousands of years
not a grain of sand is wet by tears
And the saints proclaim:
None has a smile to claim
We wiped out every tear
Which any face could smear
And the Saints proclaim:
We robbed smiles from every lip
We made, it seems, the world boring
Happiness monotonous, with sorrows destroyed!*

Mahabali wonders: ' What is right? What is wrong? Probably man won't find it out. Possibly, sorrow is the eternal truth. God's promise was to take incarnation when righteousness would be on the decline. But when righteousness conquered wrekedness God takes an incarnation to justify decept!' Meditation over such Contradictions has taken not only the mythological character but the poet also to the truth of the polarity of opposites. Light is experienced only because darkness exists. Happiness is experienced only because sorrow exists.

The poet sees in the story of Mahabali a symbolic illustration of the truth of the Complementary nature of opposites. Vedic Concept of 'Thrivikrama' is actually a pointer to this. The three 'Vikramas' (paces) of Vishnu are mentioned in one of the hymns in Rigveda 'Two Vikramas are unknown; the third is known'. The Known 'paces' refer to day time as Vishnu is the Sun God. The third pace refers to nighttime. Thus thrivikrama is the unified embodiment of the two opposites light and darkness. This, the poet finds is applicable to every phenomenon which implies an opposite. In the poem, 'sirolikhitam' (Writing on the head-Destiny - 1969) this is extended to the duality of Violence and nonviolence. Absolute non violence is an impossibility. One living thing swallowing another for sustenance is an accepted law of Nature. Love and mercy are the highest values cherished by any humanist. But the humanist in the poet exhorts:-

*'With a weeping heart, I ask;
To live and to absorb life to live
Is this, O mother nature, for living things
The inevitable destiny?'*

Two volumes of poetry by Edassery have been published posthumously. 'Kumkumaprabhatam' (The saffron Dawn - 1975) and 'Anthithiri' (The lampflame at Dusk-1977). Towards the evening of life, mystery of human life and the universe seems to have been a source of emotional intensity for the poet. Meditative, metaphysical and devotional poems abound among the rather perlitic creations of this period. Some of the poems are outwardly on simple incidents of day to day life. But inwardly they spread wings to wider horizons in the form of a quest of the abiding truth and the ultimate motive.

The poet had never been free from financial worries in his life, but he led a contented life, enjoying love and cooperation from the members of his large family. As has already been pointed out, a crystallised sadness as an inextricable part of the inner self helped to humanise the poetic being. That sadness sprung from his inherent

capacity to hear the 'still sad music of humanity.' Its magnitude was so big that personal and, domestic worries found no significant place there. Yet, parenthood of suffering humanity would not completely drown the domestic aspect in an affectionate and Conscientious parent. The sorrow that he could not give proper educational facilities to his first and second sons remained an aching thought in him. In a poem, 'oramma patunnum' (A mother sings - 1961) the "mother is actually the father himself.

'Brave you are; but not to face any enemy you had to go

Wise you are; but not to awaken the unwise world you had to go

Forced you were to go to make a living and to wander in alien lands far away

Ah! just to make a living!

Never I can take this thorn-truth off my heart'.

Yet dignity, self respect and Contentment were also strong traits of his character. An ever warm optimism would not allow the mist of pessimism to creep in. His last poem is a letter to a friend in which he says.

No debt bothers me now

No balance left for tomorrow's shopping either

The thief will sneer at me

More so will do the rich

I wish both see me the same way

Till I dissolve into the elements.

In every poem of Edassery a drop of tear and a spark of fire combined together to crystallise into a star. Tears and fires were the perennial fountain of poetry for him. There was not a period when it was dried up during his whole life, an incessant struggle. It is significant that among the great Archetypes in the Indian collective unconscious, the two outstanding figures that were a source of energy for him were Hanuman and Markandeya. Lives of both were triumphs over time. In two poems on Hanuman (one written in 1932 and another in 1962) and

in the poem of Markandeya (1964) the voice within the voice of the speaking self is that of the Poetic self whose creative endeavours are also a triumph over the destructive forces of Time. In the second poem on Hanuman the energy of that "deathless soul" (Chiranjeev) is identified with that of Ezhuttacclam, the father of Malayalam Poetry, whose legacy Edassery has inherited. Another eminent poet, N.V. Krishna warriar once qualified the poetry of Edassery as a manifestation of creative psychic energy. The two Archetypal figures are also manifestation of Psychic energy. Tears and fires were the elements that made them stars on the firmament of Eternity. They fought against and conquered indefatigable forces. The tears in Edassery's personality were the tears for the suffering humanity. The fire in him was the revolutionary spirit which would fight for alleviating the suffering.

The sparkle and brightness that we experience in every poem of his is the fire and tear of the star.

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Kottayam)
3. Kavithadhwani - Literary Criticism 1985
(Dr. Leelavathy
Pub. N.B.S.
Kottayam)
4. Ita, oru Kavi (Here is a poet) 1966
Studies of the Poems of Edassery
by various authors.
Pub. Current Books
Trichur
5. History of Malayalam Poetry 1980, 1985,
Dr. Leelavathy 1991, 1996
Pub. Kerala Sahitya Akademi
6. Kairaliyute Katha
(Story of Malayalam Literature)
Prof. N. Krishna pillai
Pub. N.B.S.
Kottayam
7. All the collections of Poetic Compositions given
in the list.

Works of Edassery Govindan Nair

I. Collections of Poems.

- | | | |
|-----|---|------|
| 1 | Alakavali (Chaster of curls) | 1940 |
| 2. | Puttan Kalavum Arivalum
(The Fresh Claypot and scythe) | 1951 |
| 3. | Laghu Ganarinial (Short Lyrics) | 1954 |
| 4. | Karutta Chettichikal
(The black hawker women) | 1955 |
| 5. | Tattvas'sthrarigal lerarirumpot
(when Ideologies Slumber) | 1961 |
| 6. | Kavile Pattu
(The Song of the Sacred Grove) | 1966 |
| 7. | Oru Piti Nellikka
(A handful of gooseberries) | 1968 |
| 8. | Thrivikrarnannu Mumpil
(Facing Thrivikrama) | 1971 |
| 9. | Kumkuma Prabhatam
(The Saffron Dawn) | 1975 |
| 10. | Antithiri (The Lampflame at Dusk) | 1977 |
| 11. | Complete poetic works of Edassery
(Ed. Prof K. Gopalakrishnan) | 1988 |

II. Plays

- | | | |
|----|---|------|
| 1. | Koottukrishni (Collective farming) | 1947 |
| 2. | Kaliyurn Chiriyum (Play and Laughter) | 1954 |
| 3. | Netiyil Pataratta Mulla
(The Jasmine creeper without & support) | |
| 4. | Chaliyathi (The chliya woman) | 1960 |
| 5. | Erin Chutta Appam
Pieces of Bread - Just one for each
(Hand to month Existence) | 1957 |
| 6. | Nootamala (The Knotted threads)
(The knotted problem) | 1950 |

